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**‘Professional Identity: the case of Careers Guidance
Practitioners in England’**

By

John Gough

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To my family who have been on this journey with me, too.

DECLARATION

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the thesis is to identify and explore the extent and characteristics of a shared professional identity of careers guidance practitioners in England. It addresses the perceived limitations of the existing literature concerning the careers guidance profession and its practitioners. This literature often portrays the sector as weakened and fragmented, and lacking in political and structural leverage, particularly in the wake of the introduction of the Connexions Service in 2001, and the aftermath of the Education Act (2011). Its practitioners are also represented as de-professionalised or de-motivated (e.g., Colley et al, 2010), with reduced connections to professional communities and associations, and with their sense of professionalism limited by the organisations in which they work. Further, the literature often reflects wider debates concerning the effects of neo-liberal managerialism on professionals in public service provision (e.g., Evetts, 2005). The latter overlooks individuals' sense of agency in shaping their everyday work practices.

In addressing this problematic, the research project explores a number of key areas and questions. These include: the existence of a shared professional identity; its features; the conditions and processes by which the identity is shaped and created; the ways in which practitioners connect with communities of practice (Wenger, 1998); and their engagement with, and influence on, the organisations in which they operate when expressing their agency. The adopted qualitative methodology is consistent with the nature of the enquiry into this lived experience; and uses grounded theory method, particularly the Strauss and Corbin (1990) approach, to interrogate the rich narratives offered by the research participants who were drawn from a variety of provider contexts.

The key finding of the research is that, despite the on-going challenges faced by the profession in England, not least the lack of a workforce development strategy, the

participants' accounts do attest to a common professional identity. The enquiry also identifies the conditions and processes by which such an identity is created, and reveals empowered and knowledgeable social actors (Giddens, 1984) who are not yoked to managerialism. The thesis' contribution is to advance the debate concerning the professional identity of careers guidance practitioners, and provides fresh insights into the ways of which identity and agency are created and expressed. It also identifies further areas for research, and suggests that Stones' strong structuration (2005) may offer a useful tool to promote specific and ontic-level enquiry into professionalism and professional identity.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The nature and extent of professional identity amongst careers guidance practitioners in England: the problematic

The overall aim of this qualitative study is to explore the extent, nature and features of a shared professional identity amongst careers guidance practitioners in England. In addressing this aim, it seeks to explore the ways in which a shared identity arises, and in particular examines in-depth the precise relationship between the research participants and the organisational structures in which they work. This research is in direct response to the limitations of much of the recent literature concerning the careers guidance profession, and its practitioners. The literature tends to portray careers guidance as a weakened, fragmented profession that lacks political and structural leverage; and that its practitioners are often demotivated, disempowered, disconnected from communities of practice, and limited by their organisational contexts in which they work. In short, the discourse overlooks the role of creative agency (Stones, 2005), and reflects the oppositional construct between managerialism and practitioners values (e.g., Evetts, 2005; Banks, 2006) that can cast practitioners as being subject to sovereign, overpowering organisational dictates (Mackey, 2007) . In identifying these limitations, and the research problematic, this study makes a contribution by offering alternative perspectives to these discourses; exploring the extent and nature of a shared professional identity developed by knowledgeable agents; and adopting a theoretical perspective in strong structuration (Stones 2005) to identify the more precise and ontologically specific relationship between agency and structure.

A further question that underpins the genesis of the study is this: why is careers guidance and its practitioners worthy of such in-depth research? One answer to this question is the historic importance of careers guidance internationally, and to UK governments' concerns with the education, employment and training of the potential and current workforce.

As Peck (2004) points out, this importance stretches back to the early twentieth century, when the Association of Juvenile Employment and Welfare Officers came into existence in 1914. Historically, governments have expected careers guidance (and its various names before this term was coined) to achieve two things (sometimes at the same time, sometimes separately). Firstly, to support the nation's economic prosperity by helping people to choose jobs and careers that are best suited to them as well as employers' needs; and secondly, to help protect society against the social and welfare ills caused by unemployment. An associated aim with the latter is supporting individuals to realise their potential.

Not only has careers guidance been seen as important to promoting society's economic prosperity and social well-being, but it also deals with one of the main ways in which people find and express meaning in their lives: through their work. The motivation to work not only fulfils several 'needs and wants' (Maslow, 1987), such as basic survival needs, the desire to affiliate and achieve at a high level; but also acts as one of the main ways in which people create meaning and become active social agents in shaping the environments in which they live and move (Giddens, 1984). Indeed, the conditions of late or liquid modernity (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000) are indicated particularly by the shifting and much less secure career patterns that people follow (Collin and Young, 2000); and so the need for careers guidance to prepare and support clients to manage such complexity is high, as indicated by the centrality of employability to the mission statements of Further Education (FE) colleges and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

A further aspect underpinning the research is that careers guidance is a skilful process, informed by rigorous theories and models. It also demands an ethical approach (as indicated by the CDI's code of ethical practice, 2014) and a self-reflective professional stance (Johns, 2013). In other words, careers guidance practitioners should not simply 'tell' people what to do, based on some omniscient insights into their clients' suitability for the job market.

Instead, they use skills of open questions; active and intense listening; helping clients to make sense of their narratives; and effective use of careers information to support choices (Kidd, 2006). In this way, its aspirational approach is profoundly humanistic (Watts, 1996) in recognising clients' capacities and rights to self-determination and learning.

An additional point to note, too, is that careers guidance services have been (and continue to be) offered in organisations that are concerned with education, employment and training. These include schools; further education (FE) colleges; higher education institutions (HEIs); adult guidance and community settings, such as the National Careers Service (NCS) in England; and privately, where careers advisers, coaches or mentors work with employees individually, or as part of contracted services that may be assisting with aspects of organisational change. This variety of service provision and role nomenclature, across the four countries of the UK and across sectors, has not always been to the profession's advantage, both in terms of coherence and power, as the following section begins to explore.

1.2 And yet...the effects of rapid policy developments and change

If careers guidance is important to governments for the reasons outlined above, then why is my research necessary now? Part of the initial impetus was the need to explore the impact of the rapid change experienced by the profession delivering careers guidance over the last twenty years on practitioners' sense of professionalism and professional identity, particularly in relation to provision in schools in England.

An example of these rapid changes was the full introduction of the Connexions Service in England in 2001, where the structural, political, cultural and human resource realignments (Bolman and Deal, 2003) experienced by careers guidance were profound and far reaching. One feature of this new service that signified the extent of the change was the role of Personal Adviser. In the view of the then New Labour Government, careers guidance

practitioners were serving only an already relatively privileged group of young people in society, and not addressing the structural barriers by those who at risk of becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (Peck, 2004). The term and role of careers advisers and careers guidance was thus *replaced* by Personal Adviser who would offer an holistic support role that would include careers advice, finance, welfare and even social work type functions (Watts, 2001).

As the New Labour administration drew to a close in 2010, there were some promising indicators of a re-emergence of the activity of *careers guidance* and a recognition by government of the Connexions' compromised model. As Watts (2014) noted, the service began as a targeted support model that was also meant to help mainstream young people; and this stretching of its remit resulted in inconsistent service provision throughout England. A further positive initiative was the Careers Profession Task Group, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver, and whose report (DfE, 2010) made recommendations regarding a stronger and more coherent professional body, identity and an entry and training route into the profession.

Thus, the Career Development Institute (CDI) was established in 2013, with the merging of four previously separate professional bodies, including the Institute of Career Guidance, and the Association of Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG). However, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) elected not to join the new body – an indicator of what some commentators have called a fragmented, Balkanised profession (Bimrose et al., 2013), with apparently little connection, or commonality, between careers guidance practitioners from the various provider settings. In this way, a practitioner from a higher education setting is seen being very different in purpose and activities compared to one from a school, further education or adult setting. This is also an illustration of the problems caused by the professions' variety of provisions and roles as noted above.

The effects of the subsequent Education Act (2011), which returned to schools in England the statutory duty to provide *access* to independent and impartial advice, rather killed off these faint green shoots of hope. Indeed, Roberts (2013) went so far as to say that the policies and practices of the Coalition government amounted to ‘attempted murder’ of the profession. One indicator of the Act’s effects on careers guidance in schools was the Ofsted report (2013) which was sharply critical of the patchiness of provision. The extent to which the Careers and Enterprise Company for Schools in England (DfE, 2014) will address these issues remains to be seen.

1.3 Negative and gloomy discourses?

The research of scholars such as Artaraz (2006), Reid (2007), Colley and colleagues (2010), Roberts (2013) and Watts (2014) into the impact of this seismic change created a bleak picture of the impact on the profession. Colley in particular noted the extent of demoralised, over-managed and de-professionalised staff, especially those who had trained as careers guidance practitioners, and held the former professional qualification, the Diploma in Career Guidance (DipCG). This traducing of their professional identity was furthered when those with the DipCG were required to undergo organisationally-contingent qualifications, such as the NVQ level 4 in Advice and Guidance (Watts, 2001a) – almost as a re-programming exercise. Some writers such as Bimrose and Hearne, (2012), Hughes (2013a), Mulvey (2013) and Neary (2014) offer more positive perspectives, particularly concerning practitioners’ resilience and the potential role of CPD and further study in shoring up professional identity.

However, there is still a lingering view that careers guidance is a Balkanised profession (Bimrose et al., 2013) without a common professional identity, so that a careers adviser in a school is ‘different’ to one in an FE college who is also different to practitioners

in HEIs and so on. And worse still, its power and leverage is too weak to convince government to form a regulatory bargain (Larson, 1977) so that the CDI has no legal authority to stipulate and enforce entry requirements to the profession (like the Law Society does for solicitors).

Scholars' and writers' views as outlined above seem to fit into an on-going discourse concerning the professions that serve the health, education and social services sectors. That is, the power and prevalence of the accounting logic (Broadbent et al., 1997) in public services is irresistible; and, therefore, leads to inevitable conflict between managers and practitioners (Evetts, 2005), with the latter being subject to much tighter control through 'hard' measures and performance indicators.

This overview of the profession's recent developments creates a rather dismal, deterministic and pessimistic picture; and may seem to contradict (or even defeat) one of the initial impulses for the research. However, the apparent bleakness of the prospects for the careers guidance profession, and the allegedly fragmented professional identities of its practitioners, served only to intensify my reasons for wanting to pursue this research.

1.4 A different narrative; and assumptions about what professional identity is

Given careers guidance's long-standing importance to governments' policies concerning education, employment and training, and its skilful and ethical process that deals with the very ways in which people make meanings, a series of questions then becomes evident, and which amplify the overall aim of the research highlighted in 1.1 above. That is, is there a different story to tell about careers guidance in England that contrasts with the pessimistic view outlined above, and one which puts at its heart, the narratives and meanings expressed by practitioners about being professional, and having a professional identity? Are they oppressed by neo-liberal managerialism (Banks, 2004), or do they find ways to support

clients that are consistent with the values and motivations that led them into the profession in the first place? Is there an alternative, more complex and more affirming perspective than the one expressed in much of the literature concerning the careers guidance profession? Most importantly, too, what actually is the professional identity of careers guidance practitioners? Is there a shared one; and what are its features? It is my strong contention that a more general definition of professional identity is often posited (e.g. in Mulvey, 2013; Neary, 2014) without any real exploration of ‘what it is’ for careers guidance. And, further, much of the literature about the apparent woes of practitioners focusses on those in schools, rather than taking account of the profession as a whole.

This is the contribution this PhD is seeking to make: to answer these issues; and to seek to generate a model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) of professional identity for careers guidance as a whole, rather than one for particular organisational contexts. A further aspect of the original contribution of my thesis is to critically explore, and identify, the *precise* nature of the relationship between practitioners and the contexts in which they operate, both within their host organisations and between the various partners and stakeholders of the services they provide. These partnerships can include other professionals, such as teachers and social workers, as well as career guidance practitioners in other settings. To support this exploration, my literature review (chapters two and three) critically appraises in particular the strong structuration proposed by Stones (2005). His perspective argues firmly for a more precise and specific exploration of the ways in which agents operate within their daily structures, e.g., work settings, to produce meanings (such as professional identity) and outcomes that can influence and shape their everyday contexts.

As well as identifying its prevalence and common features, my thesis also accounts for the ways in which the professional identity of career guidance practitioners is structured. This approach, in my view, directly challenges the overly-deterministic nature of the

literature I have alluded to above, and the more general definition (and assumptions) of professional identity applied to career guidance.

1.5 My career narrative and its significance for the research

As Woodward (2002) notes, questions of self and identity pre-occupy, even obsess, us more in the complex, global and inter-dependent world in which we live. What follows may seem to fall into this trap of self-regard, and run counter to more positivistic research methodologies, where the researcher is meant to be objective, neutral, even invisible in the process (Robson, 2011).

That said, it is important to critically examine the potential impact of my career background on the research process. I began my career in careers guidance in 1992 at Coventry Polytechnic as a Careers and Appointments Adviser, the title signifying the gatekeeping role between graduate and graduate recruiter (The Milkround) that HEI careers and appointments services held at that time (Watts, 1996). This functional role of careers guidance is explored in more detail in chapter two. As well as supporting students' choice through one to one interviews and group work, I was also active in the professional body, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), with activities such as occupational profile research and generating information products for member services to use. My role diversified further when I worked as a project officer on ESF-funded projects in the late 1990s, concerning the potential jobs market that local and regional small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) could offer to graduates. This was an interesting functional shift for HEI careers services; having to become much more involved in local and regional economic development networks signalled the challenge to its previous gatekeeping role posed by the decline of The Milkround in the wake of the early nineties recession.

In 2000, and as a result of the variety of the roles I had undertaken, I became the Head of Careers at De Montfort University (DMU), Leicester; before being promoted, first to Head of Careers and Student Welfare and then, in 2006, to Director of Student Services. These developments were accompanied by my involvement in AGCAS: firstly as a board member (for five years) and then as AGCAS President from 2002 to 2004. I also led aspects of the AGCAS/University of Reading Postgraduate Diploma in Careers Guidance, and taught on two modules. This experience as an educator was much more consistent with my values as a careers guidance practitioner, rather than being a senior manager at DMU, and I moved to my first full-time role in lecturing at Coventry University in March 2008, where I am now course director for the PGDip/MA in Career Guidance. This experience of being a practitioner, project worker, manager, senior manager, president, and now educator is by no means unique. However, I am sometimes reminded by colleagues that the combination of roles, and particularly at a senior level, is unusual.

The net effects of this experience, and its implications for my research, are several. Firstly, I have privileged insights into the development of the profession *as a whole*, since my role as AGCAS President brought me into regular contact with counterparts from other professional bodies, e.g. the then ICG. Linked to this, I developed quite an acute understanding of the relationship of the profession, and its then professional bodies, to government; and the understanding (or lack of) and expectations of careers guidance that senior figures in various government departments had of career guidance. Further, I have a large network of contacts at various levels and in a wide variety of institutions – an advantage that my methodology and methods chapter critically examines, particularly in relation to the ease with which I recruited participants.

Having developed this insider's view of careers guidance, its profession, its professional bodies, its senior figures, managers, practitioners and so on, is also a mixed

blessing. There are a number of challenges to overcome. One is to be able to step back from such involvement, and be able to relate the nature, purpose, functions and organisation of careers guidance in a clear, straightforward manner that does not oversimplify the complexity of these features. A second one is to operationalise my research methods *as a researcher*, and to put aside as far as possible any assumptions I might make about the participants' backgrounds, perspectives, and indeed their answers to my research questions. A third is my position in relation to the ways in which the literature concerning the health, education and social care professions can be constructed. Scholars such as Banks (2004; 2009) and Evetts (2005), as well as earlier writers such as Broadbent et al. (1997), often cast the debate about the effects of New Right policies on public services (Alcock et al., 2008) in oppositional terms: neo-liberal managers fixated by the accounting logic (Ibid.) versus ethical yet victimised practitioners who try and retain their client-centredness. Much of the literature concerning the careers guidance profession also reflects this paradigm (e.g. Reid and West, 2011). In my career, I have straddled this apparently oppositional construct, and can reflect on the fact that I see the value and drawbacks of both perspectives. Further, I am also conscious of a kind of role and professional liminality (Gourlay, 2011) where I have been a practitioner, manager, and senior manager; and now an educator. I have been all of these and yet none of them, in that I do not feel professionally identified.

The implications of this independent perspective for the research is, I hope, to enable me to resist any assumptions about what constitutes a professional identity for careers guidance, and indeed its existence; and thereby retain a practically useful scepticism about the prevalence of what is now becoming the archetype of the victimised practitioner.

1.6 My research questions and approach

As stated at the beginning of this introduction, the aim of my thesis is to explore careers guidance practitioners' sense of their professional identity; the features of such an identity; and the extent to which it is shared, whatever the context. In addressing this aim, I have the following related and interlinked research questions:

- Is there a common and shared professional identity of careers guidance practitioners across the variety of delivery settings (e.g., schools, colleges, HEIs and adult guidance)?
- How has this identity been constructed by practitioners? What have been the enabling and influencing factors, particularly the role of contextual and structural factors, such as education, organisational settings, and other practitioners?
- What have been the precise sense-making processes employed by the practitioners?
- What are the specific features of the identity, as expressed by practitioners?
- Does the existence of a common and shared identity, and its features, indicate practitioners' sense of agency, influence and empowerment within the contexts in which they operate?
- Do practitioners feel part of a wider 'community of practice', and indeed part of a profession?
- Does the existence of a common professional identity, and communities of practice, offer a different perspective to the views concerning the profession's relative lack of power and prestige, and its Balkanised, fragmented nature?
- And to what extent do these processes indicate rich and complex relationships between agency and structure, which may also have wider relevance to developing

our understanding of how practitioners in the public sector continue to survive and thrive?

To address these questions, and enable me to use my career ‘assets’ outlined above (e.g. extensive networks) for the benefit of the research, I chose grounded theory method. This research methodology and strategy fits best with my concern to explore notions of professional identity, and generate a substantive model, ‘from the ground up’ without the adverse intrusion of previous assumptions. Further, the approach offers a rigorous set of methods (especially Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the aim of which is to promote a theory properly grounded in the data.

1.7 Outline of the chapters and structure of the thesis

A summary of the ways in which each chapter is linked, and the ways in which they address the research objective, is presented below:

1.7.1 Chapter two: the development of careers guidance provisions and its practitioners in England: functions; structure and power

The aim of this chapter is to clearly establish the problematic posed by the existing literature and discourse concerning the development, function and structural provision of careers guidance and its practitioners. The problematic has a number of linked strands that the chapter identifies and explores, using functionalist, structural and power-based perspectives. These include the variety of definitions of careers guidance; societal expectations of the profession; and its political leverage. Key limitations of the literature are also critically discussed. These include the ways in which the literature tends to discuss problems of professionalism and identity in relation to practitioners in schools, and which creates a picture of a fragmented profession. In addition, the discourse concerning

practitioners casts them as demotivated and deprofessionalised, and overlooks the role of agency in their everyday practices. This view reflects the wider paradigm that characterises the debate concerning public sector-based practitioners, and their struggles with managerialism. A further key limitation is the way in which recent literature concerning careers guidance practitioners often assumes a general definition of professional identity, rather than its particular features that arise out of practitioners' agency.

1.7.2 Chapter three: the relationship between agency and structure; and epistemological perspectives

Having identified the problematic posed by the limitations of the existing literature, this chapter identifies the main theoretical perspectives that will be used to guide, and also sensitise, the research methodology, method, data analysis and critical discussion. The main perspective adopted in structuration, and particularly strong structuration (Stones, 2005). The latter seeks to explore the precise relationships between agency and structure, and its concerns with ontology-in-situ, and the ontic level of analysis, are very relevant to the aims of my research. Stones' challenge to researchers to explore 'the intersection of agents and external structures in position-practice relations' (2005: 118 – my stress) is particularly pertinent in exploring the extent of a shared professional identity amongst careers guidance practitioners. In identifying this perspective as the key sensitising one for the thesis generation, the chapter also critically examines the value of early concepts by Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1989); and how subsequent critiques by Archer (1995) and Mouzelis (1991) strengthen the call for more careful explorations of the precise relationships between agency and structure.

The chapter also discusses my chosen epistemological perspective – that of a constrained idealist (Blaikie, 2010) – and the ways in which this is consistent with my

research and adopted theoretical perspective. Overall, this chapter thus establishes the basis of my research design.

1.7.3 Methodology and methods

Having identified the problematic, and my guiding theoretical and epistemological perspectives, then this chapter sets out the rationale for my choice of an interpretivist, qualitative methodology, and grounded theory as my method. The chapter also details the particular discipline of the method I adopted – one based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) method. In addition, it justifies the reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews as my data collection tool; my sampling strategy (in terms of my initial and then subsequent theoretical sampling); and my sample composition. This chapter also sets out my approach to coding and generating categories, based on Strauss and Corbin's (Ibid.) techniques, in order to then generate my model of professional identity. Finally, I also discuss the ways in which I have assured quality, validity and trustworthiness in my research design and execution.

1.7.4 Chapter five: data presentation and analysis

The tables presented in this chapter contain the main codes that were produced by the coding techniques I discussed in the previous chapter. They cover: motivation to enter the profession; job satisfactions and dissatisfactions; professionalism: foundations; definitions; and making meanings. The latter is particularly critical for the generation of my model of professional identity. The participants' rich narratives are presented in detail to support each category; and in most, are organised to reflect the participants' organisational setting. The advantages of doing so are that the commonalities of expression and meaning, despite the settings, are strong but also the particular dimensions of each setting, as they add to the richness of practice and meaning, are also clear. Further, organising the data presentation in this way is consistent with the chosen theoretical perspective – strong structuration – which

as summarised above in 1.7.2 foreground precise details and analysis. The chapter also identifies surprising but also original findings, e.g., the importance of professional expertise in labour market information (LMI) to the sense of professional identity, and the link between client-centred practice and respectful partnership work with other practitioners. The strongest message from the data is its challenge to the limitation of the discourses identified in chapter two.

1.7.5 Chapter six: discussion; and generating a model of professional identity

This chapter then discusses the key findings from the data, using strong structuration as a guiding and sensitising perspective, to fully address the problematic identified in the introduction, and chapter two, and to generate a model of professional identity for careers guidance practitioners in England. With regard to the latter, it is made clear that the model is a substantive and not a general one. The discussions considers each of the main codes identified in the previous chapter, the ways in which they critique the perspectives presented in chapter two, and the ways in which concepts such as conditions for action, creative agency, and the Quadripartite Model of Strong Structuration (Stones, 2005) are instrumental in developing the model. The elements of the model, and the ways in which they are structured, and provide the conditions for each other, are then presented and discussed. This model represents the contribution that my thesis is making to the literature concerning careers guidance and its practitioners.

1.7.6 Conclusions

As well as confirming the contribution that the thesis has made to the literature, the concluding chapter also identifies its limitations, and suggestions for further research. Importantly, too, the implications for the profession, and the development and training of

practitioners, are discussed. Finally, the different, stronger and more positive story that the thesis is presenting (almost on behalf of the practitioners) is confirmed.

Having set out the rationale for, and aims of, the thesis, chapter two now examines the research problematic fully, and sets the context for the thesis in its discussion of the development, function, features and provision of careers guidance, and its practitioners.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREERS GUIDANCE PROVISION AND ITS PRACTITIONERS IN ENGLAND: FUNCTIONS; STRUCTURE; AND POWER

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the limitations (as well as some of the strengths) of the existing literature and discourse concerning the development of careers guidance and its practitioners is critically appraised. The theoretical perspectives that feature here draw on functionalism, structure and power, so that the definitions and functions of careers guidance in relation to government agendas regarding employment, education and training, particularly in England, can be identified and critically explored. These perspectives, or lenses, help to illuminate the development of the profession, especially since the Second World War, and its persisting lack of political and structural leverage in securing a regulatory bargain (Macdonald, 1995) with the state. Questions of status and power have characterised much of the recent literature about public sector-based professions and roles, e.g., medical staff, teachers, and social workers, so that an oppositional, managerialist/practitioners paradigm emerges, where managers seek to tie practitioners' accountabilities and work horizons to the organisation (Evetts, 2005; Banks 2006). As this chapter shows, the literature regarding careers guidance tends to reflect the rather deterministic and pessimistic view, perhaps in response the major changes to the provisions of careers guidance in England since 1996, and particularly with the arrival of Connexions in 2001. Careers guidance practitioners are also cast in this light: as rather disempowered and de-professionalised (e.g., Colley et al., 2010), and almost victims of sovereign forces (Mackay, 2007) which they have little control over, or insights into.

The importance of this chapter to the development of my thesis is multi-stranded. As well as providing in-depth insights into the defining and development of careers guidance, it

also delineates the contexts in which careers guidance is delivered, such as schools, further education (FE) colleges, universities and adult guidance settings. The limitations of the deterministic and gloomy discourses are also critically discussed, not least in the way in which they overlook the role of practitioners' agency (and indeed, professional identity) – indeed, much of the literature often overlooks their role in the development and delivery of services. Where they are discussed, they tend to be portrayed as disempowered, or – and this is crucial for my thesis – in ways that are based on an ontology in general (Stones, 2005), rather than one which explores the specifics of their practice. In this way, a further weakness of the literature – a tendency to assume a more general definition of professional identity (e.g., Neary, 2013) – is also critically evaluated.

That said, the perspectives that are critically discussed do offer some useful concepts that are then mobilised in subsequent chapters. For example, the trait approach to defining professions (e.g., Millerson, 1964) is relevant to the ways in which the research participants defined aspects of their work and expertise, as shown in the chapters that cover the data presentation and analysis, and the critical discussion. Further, the exploration of the provider contexts, and their characteristics, are useful, when I consider in the subsequent chapter the relevance to my thesis of perspectives that critically chart the relationship between agency and structure. Details of the providers' contexts and features will ensure that the latter is fully explored and made meaningful, rather than simply assumed. In addition, questions of role nomenclature are relevant to the data presentation and analysis chapter, and the critical discussion, since I argue that practitioners may transcend organisational labels when expressing and operationalising their professional identity.

The sequence of the chapter is as follows. Initially, it seeks to define and critically explore what careers guidance 'is', and the associated debates concerning the ways its definition and nomenclature have evolved. Indeed, the variety of names for the roles that

practitioners from the sector occupy (Neary, Marriott and Hooley, 2014) indicate some of the problems of esteem and recognition that this chapter discusses. After critically exploring these definitions, and their associated problems, it charts and critically analyses the role that governments in England have expected careers guidance to play. The sociological perspective that will underpin this analysis is functionalism (Durkheim, 1893/1984) which examines the role that institutions and professions play in maintaining society's structures, such as class.

Allied to this functionalism is an historical sociological perspective (Stones, 2005) which will explore the organisational contexts in which careers guidance has developed, particularly since the Second World War. Much of the existing literature focusses on the development of the services in schools (e.g., Peck, 2004) – a further indicator of its limitations. In response to this limitation, this chapter sets out the key developments in the provision of careers guidance in FE, HEIs, and adult guidance settings. It is important to analyse the contexts so that a more complete and current overview of the role that the profession has played in the development of the education system (in England particularly) since 1945. More importantly, this overview highlights the reasons why careers guidance is often seen as Balkanised (Bimrose et al., 2013), and contingent upon the organisational setting on which it relies. This fragmented view, and its role in how practitioners are viewed as disconnected from each other, is also critically appraised.

The review will then extend the perspectives above that are concerned mainly with *structure* by considering notions of professional power and esteem (Johnson, 1972). In particular, definitions of the profession (e.g. Larson, 1977) are analysed to consider the ways in which careers guidance has sought to achieve social closure (Weber, 1976) by striking a regulatory bargain with the state (Macdonald, 1995). That is, the extent to which the profession has gained the legislative power to establish its knowledge base, education and

training curriculum, and systems by which practitioners are admitted to, and regulated by, a credible and legitimised professional body.

The argument pursued by the first part of this chapter – of the powerful and deterministic nature of structures (Archer, 1995) – is developed further by a critical analysis of existing discourses and perspectives concerning the professions, and careers guidance more particularly. Much of the latter, particularly since the advent of the Connexions service in 2001, has often presented a disconsolate picture of demoralised and demotivated staff, and indeed the ‘attempted murder’ of the profession by government’s policies in England, most notably the Education Act (2011) (Roberts, 2013).

In contrast to these structure-based, power-focused discourses that seem to reflect a limited, and limiting, view of careers guidance practitioners, chapter three considers theoretical perspectives that offer a corrective to such determinism. It critically analyses the relevance to my thesis of concepts that explore, and define, the relationship between agency and structure. There is a particular focus on structuration theories: not just those by Giddens (1984) or Bourdieu (1989); but also by more recent theorists, such as Stones (2005), who argue for the vitality and relevance of strong structuration, supported by rigorous research, to the questions of how people make meaning in their everyday contexts, such as the organisations in which they work.

2.2 What is careers guidance? How is it defined and what does it seek to achieve?

Having introduced the literature within which my chapter is framed, a series of fundamental questions are considered. What is careers guidance, and what does it seek to achieve? And, indeed, how is the idea of career defined? Still further, how should the possible confusions caused by the variety in nomenclature and terminology, e.g., career or careers; careers guidance, careers guidance, and career development, be resolved?

It is with the latter question that this section begins.

2.2.1 What do we mean by career? And career or careers?

A starting point would be a simple dictionary definition of the word ‘career’ (Oxford, 2004):

- n. an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person’s life, usually with opportunities for progress. >
- v. move swiftly and in an uncontrolled way.

The interesting aspect here is that career and occupation, or job, have been conflated. Further, career, occupation, and vocation, especially may also be conflated or separated, depending on the era or, more particularly, the subject discipline. For example, Cochrane (1990) considers vocation as covering career and life, in contrast to Furnham, (2005) who as a vocational and organisational psychologist, states that notions of career development proceed from vocational psychology – reflecting the orientation of careers guidance in USA to this branch of psychology. One of the early proponents of theories that account for careers choice, Holland (1997), uses the term vocational choices rather than career choices, again reflecting the subject orientation of theorists from the USA.

A further apparently simple (and yet rather significant) issue to tackle is the use of career or careers. The profession, its provision, and associated theorists, are not especially

helpful in setting a consistent path. Firstly, there is the professional body in the United Kingdom (UK), the Career Development Institute (CDI). The justification for using the term career is that it reflects more recent theories of career choice. For example, Super's (1994) later theoretical formulations propose the idea that career encompasses the choices that a person makes during her or his life, including those in areas other than jobs or work, such as volunteering, or even parental roles. In this way, people have one career: life.

Further, more current conceptions of a career also take account of the impact of wider contextual factors, not least the apparent shift from of Western societies from industrial to post-industrial employment structures, on ideas of career. For example, globalisation, and the emergence of global corporations funded by shareholders, led to massive changes in company structures, e.g. delayering of management tiers, outsourcing of production to other countries where labour was cheaper, and more flexible staff structures, so that job security became much more uncertain (Sparrow and Marchington, 1998). This was in contrast to structural employment patterns, where education and training was tied much more closely to needs of employers, so that, for example, school leavers would be located in a factory, or a typing pool, according to their geographical location and educational experience and level (Ashton and Field, 1976).

In this post-industrial period, the notion of a career is now seen as a more mutable concept. For Littlejohn and colleagues (2000: 101), bounded structures which defined entry and progression more tightly, e.g. in a factory, or pre-Big Bang financial institutions, have been replaced by boundary-less environments, where employees can no longer expect secure employment, clear (if slow) progression and funded training. As a result, they now need to take charge of their own careers by continually scanning the environment for possible changes that may affect their role, and maintaining and developing their skills set and qualifications –

or, to express it using current terminology, to become employable, with high employability skills, rather than simply being employed (Hawkins, 1995; Yorke and Knight, 2006).

A further aspect of employability and career patterns is the changed nature of organisations. This idea of increased organisational accountability, particularly in public sector professions, is explored further in this chapter, where the power and esteem of the careers guidance profession is analysed. However, it is worth noting here that the primacy of the accounting logic (Broadbent et al., 1997), where cost and quantitative performance indicators push employees (including those from higher status professions, such as doctors) to quantify their impact and justify their professionalism in relation to organisational requirements (Evetts, 2005). Thus, the idea of a career not only encompasses the need to become employable, but also more transparently accountable to the employer – changes which have particularly bitten in the public sector, where services (and cultures) are more marketised (Alcock et al., 2008). Subsequent discussions in this chapter show how careers guidance practitioners have been subject to these rapid changes – though again, the extent to which these changes have traduced their agency and identity is a critical aspect of this thesis.

However, if the above points suggest that career guidance is the most current and applicable term, Watts (1996), Neary (2014) and Neary, Marriot and Hooley (2014) make reference to careers, careers services, careers practitioners, careers advisers; and there are representative bodies such as Careers England. Indeed, one could argue that the term *career guidance* seems concerned with one career, i.e., there is one, ideal type; whereas practitioners help clients with their careers. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will therefore use the word careers and careers guidance (especially when considering definitions of careers guidance as considered below); though I will also use career either where scholars debate the concept of a career or where a type of intervention is labelled as such, e.g., career learning.

2.2.2 What is careers guidance? What does it seek to achieve?

In the light of less secure careers patterns, what now defines the aims of careers guidance and what should it achieve?

These questions also present further problems of definition and terminology. From a layperson's perspective, it may be difficult to split neatly the divisions between information, advice and guidance, since as we will explore below, careers services offer all three. To add to the definitional difficulty, there are also the other terms like: careers counselling; careers education; career learning; career management skills; career development; career coaching; and career mentoring. There is something of the zeitgeist in these terms, as well as aspects of marketing and branding associated with different providers. For example, one research participant who is self-employed, and works with a range of corporate clients in career and organisation development, does not use the term careers adviser or careers guidance, but calls herself a career coach and labels her services as career coaching and mentoring. She feels these terms sit far better in the organisations in which she operates, in contrast to advice and guidance which have much more negative connotations. Another example (just to confuse the values associated with these terms) is in the National Careers Service (NCS) in England: career coaches are employed to motivate longer-term unemployed clients to, frankly, get a job; while more highly paid careers advisers will offer careers guidance during clients' initial appointments.

This latter point is an illustration of the importance of these definitional debates to the thesis's aim of identifying the prevalence of a common professional identity. In particular, to what extent does the variety of these roles imply a difference in their overall aims, and thereby signal an organisationally contingent, Balkanised profession (Bimrose et al., 2013)? Or, and as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, do the practitioners concerned

skilfully navigate the realpolitik of such contingencies whilst retaining a strong adherence to the values and activities of careers guidance?

It might be expected that a professional body might offer a clear definition of the aim of careers guidance if indeed that term is still valid. Confusingly, the two main bodies are the Career *Development* Institute (or CDI, which incorporated the former Institute of Careers Guidance, ICG); and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (or AGCAS).

The CDI offers the following definition of career development:

Career development professionals provide activities and services which assist individuals or organisations seeking support to affect a wide range of career transitions. These may be associated with life and career stages, including the development of the career ideas of young people. Contexts include educational choices, work experience and internships, labour market entry, skills and vocational training, job search, sector/management level change, promotion or transfer, redundancy, entrepreneurial business development, working identity change, disability and stress related career development issues, adjustments to life-work balance, returners to the labour market, portfolio working and pre-retirement choices.

(CDI, 2015a)

This definition reflects some of the realpolitik of the sector with which the CDI is contending, e.g. to try and become the voice of the sector as it has become more heterogeneous, and encompasses the variety of roles identified above. To retain the term careers guidance may have been less attractive to practitioners such as the research participant I mentioned above. AGCAS does not appear to offer a definition in the same way, though Winter (2009), in the AGCAS journal, 'Phoenix', was inclined to use the term careers

guidance, since it was much less confusing for clients, and as a term it is still the most commonly used.

This (perhaps subjective) view is reflected in the OECD definition which foregrounds this term as below:

Careers guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self-awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services.

(OECD, 2004: 19)

One could argue, then, that there is little to separate these two terms, except in their respective references to the contexts in which services may be offered and the reasons why clients seek help. Both emphasise the need to inform and enable choices, and develop clients' capacities to implement them for immediate and longer-term transitions; and guidance and development are concerned not with telling and directing but 'enabling and learning.' This

again reflects the humanistic philosophy that emerged in counselling (and then careers guidance) from the mid-1960s onwards (Watts, 1996). The extent to which the common aspects of these definitions indicate a shared professional identity amongst careers guidance practitioners, whatever their setting and role name, is critically examined in the discussion chapter.

Having grappled with these definitional issues, and their significance for questions of practitioners' role, identity and status, the next section examines the traits' view of the professions for its significance to the discourses regarding careers guidance and its practitioners.

2.3 The traits and functions of careers guidance

Having critically explored and analysed the definitions of careers guidance, and its purpose and aims, we now turn to examine the traits, characteristics and overall societal functions that are expected of the profession. To achieve this objective, this section draws on functionalist perspectives, particularly those of Durkheim (1893/1984), as well as those that are concerned with the traits of professions (e.g., Millerson, 1964; Larson, 1977; and Friedson, 1986, 2001). The subsequent section 2.4 will critically analyse how the profession has developed historically within the specific organisational contexts in which it operates. Taken together, these two sections will establish the contexts and structures, particularly those affected directly by legislation, that shape, control and determine the ways in the profession seeks to implement its overall aims, and meet governmental (and societal) expectations. In addition, the sections will also set out the circumstances with which careers guidance practitioners contend when fulfilling their roles. The theoretical perspectives that may account for the ways in which practitioners construct meanings and identities out these structures are critically considered in the next chapter.

The concepts discussed in these two sections foreground the role of structure in relation to defining and shaping careers guidance. That said, the critical exploration of contexts and structures links to the idea of strong structuration – particularly in establishing the ‘external structures’ (Stones, 2005:85) of the quadripartite model which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.3.1 The functions, traits and expectations of the professions

Before considering careers guidance specifically, it is useful to explore societal expectations of the professions more generally, particularly after their expansion from the mid-nineteenth century. The concepts that follow are relevant to my thesis, not least because my research participants were invited to discuss their perceptions of careers guidance in relation to their understanding of what a profession signified to them.

Durkheim (1893/1984) proposed that the professions help to maintain and also define the ways in which society’s class structure was reforming, particularly with the growth of a more stratified middle class populated by doctors, lawyers and educators during the mid- to late – nineteenth century (Perkin, 1989). Secondly, he believed that the ethics of such professions, particularly those that required high levels of knowledge, skills and public trust, such as the medical professions, would also act as a kind of a new moral order – one built on scientific and humanistic principles (Ibid.) - in a rapidly-changing society. The contention that society should act rationally – with the emerging professions both symbolising and promoting the primacy of scientific knowledge and rationality - was also shared by Weber (1976). In this way, professions and their members both work within and promote society’s structures, e.g., the ways in which doctors and nurses promote health and well-being, and fight diseases, by applying scientific knowledge and procedures.

In fulfilling these functions – of maintaining and developing society's structures – then professions both demonstrate and acquire traits or characteristics that distinguish them from jobs. Becker (1962) identified six criteria, including: the cognitive or intellectual dimensions, such as the extent of the knowledge needed; the work involving high levels of responsibility; the practitioners are learned; and that the work links strongly to practical application and so is not just theoretical. Millerson (1964) goes much further, and identifies twenty-three aspects, covering areas such as theoretical knowledge, the ways in which training is provided, the ways in which practitioners' skills and competence are tested, professional codes of conduct and public service.

These definitions seem to imply an unproblematic way of identifying a profession, and then defining its traits, as if there is some sort of natural order from which professions appear. Indeed, Caplow (1964) proposed this apparently natural process thus: that an occupation emerges; its training process and requirements are established; followed the set-up of a professional association, which then gains legal status and authority; leading finally to a formal code of practice. Halliday's (1988) contention – perhaps in response to the rise of corporations' claims of being able to define legal practice in USA – is that knowledge is a core generating trait of a profession.

Perhaps Larson's (1977: x) definition of a profession is the most comprehensive and complete, covering trait, functionalist and structural aspects:

Professions are occupations with special power and prestige. Society grants these rewards because professions have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge linked to central needs and values of the social system, and because professions are devoted to the service of the public, above and beyond material incentives.

The structural aspect in the definition is highlighted by the idea that society gives professions power in return for performing an expected role – such as health care – and maintaining the social system. This aspect is defined by the notion of the regulatory bargain (Macdonald, 1995). Such a bargain works as follows, taking the Bar Council in England as an example. The Council sets the professional standards for barristers; defines the curriculum and knowledge that they must follow and acquire; and establishes and accredits training providers that maintain exclusionary entry requirements. The implicit bargain seems to be that, in return for gaining these legal powers in relation to who and how to recruit barristers, the Bar Council helps to maintain the stratification – and prestige - of the higher reaches of the middle classes. Thus, a clear expectation of professions – often unspoken, but enforced – is to maintain a hierarchal class structure (Perkin, 1989). In particular, Larson (1977) argues that achieving the Weberian notion of social closure characterises the goal of professions.

The ways in which careers guidance as a profession has sought to pursue – and achieve – such a goal is analysed in section 2.4.6. For now, we can return to considering the functions and traits of careers guidance.

2.3.2 The functions, expectations and traits of careers guidance

If we are to apply Larson's (1977) definition above, then as Peck (2004) observes, careers guidance has been, and continues to be, expected by governments in England to fulfil two key functions linked to central needs. The latter aim was embodied by the Connexions service which was launched in England in 2001 (Watts, 2001).

In meeting these two aims, particularly since the Second World War, the profession has developed a number of traits and characteristics that link to the ideas of Becker (1962) and Millerson (1964). A starting point may be the OECD definition of careers guidance presented in section 2.2.2. As Watts (2010) argued, this definition was the first

comprehensive and most current definition of careers guidance that would apply to an international context, not just a British one. The CDI's definition of career *development* was also outlined in section 2.2.2 above. These two definitions link to and illustrate some of key traits of a profession, e.g., work that involves a high level of responsibility, and a strong practical, helping aspect. Careers guidance practitioners help clients with one of the main ways in which people find and express meaning (as well as the material means for survival) – their careers and jobs – and use practical skills, such as skilful interviewing, to do so. An additional professional trait that careers guidance demonstrates is the ethical code defined by the CDI and AGCAS. These aim to regulate practice and define its characteristics. For the CDI, the ethical principles that characterise professional careers guidance practice cover the following areas:

- The need for practitioners to be appropriately qualified; to act in a professional manner at all times that is consistent with CDI's code; and to maintain the currency and quality of their practice through continuing professional development (CPD).
- That practitioners' work should be focussed on the needs and best interests of the client; and recognises the independence (and indeed right) of the client to make choices.
- Such support should be expert and informed particularly by a strong grasp of career related and labour market information.
- Services should be underpinned by a strong ethical and practical commitment to equality and diversity.
- Services should also be open and transparent; and appropriately accountable to host organisations.

It is worth noting here, however, that in lacking the regulatory bargain with the state (Macdonald, 1995), then the CDI has few legal powers to enforce the professionalism of its members (in contrast to organisations such as the Law Society). If we were to draw together

the above factors into a list of traits of the profession, it could be argued that careers guidance has the following characteristics:

- Qualified practitioners who work with clients in educational, training, community and employment settings and who seek to support and enable client choice concerned with education, training and employment (though the actual extent of qualified practitioners in England has been critically questioned by Hughes, 2013b);
- As well as expertise in interviewing clients, practitioners also develop clients' career learning skills to manage current as well as future transitions points (Kidd, 2006);
- A further dimension of practitioners' expertise is a deep, broad and also specialist knowledge of career related information, labour market information and opportunity structures. This has the intended effect of helping to inform choice, as well as raising aspirations and widening horizons for action (Hodkinson, 1996);
- Practitioners may also work with a variety of stakeholders, such as employers, other professionals, schools, colleges, training providers and so on, both to promote the prospects and interests of their clients and to ensure that services are informed by the range of such stakeholders.

In setting out these traits, however, there are still a number of questions that pertain to my thesis. To what extent are the above recognised by careers guidance practitioners? Are they shared whatever the organisational context? And indeed, are the above too general, and lack the empirical rigour that Stones (2005) calls for in his formulation of strong structuration (as discussed in the next chapter)?

Still further, the traits above pose further problems. One concerns the entry qualifications required of careers guidance practitioners; and how these signify the extent to which the profession has managed to strike the regulatory bargain with the state (Larson, 1977). In the

wake of a review of the Connexions Service in England, the Careers Profession Task Force, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE, 2010), reviewed the state of the careers guidance profession. One of the report's recommendations was that those practitioners who deliver careers guidance should hold a minimum level 6 qualification. Indeed, in England, the level 6 Diploma in Careers Guidance and Development is now offered by the OCR, and sits alongside the level 7 qualification which is offered at postgraduate diploma level by a range of UK universities.

The problem, so to speak, is that these are recommendations - desirable but not compulsory for front-line careers practitioners; a state of affairs that has always been the case and against which the professional body – now the CDI - continues to lobby against. Indeed, it is even problematic to find a definitive statement of the number of practitioners in England who have a level 6 qualification and above. It is therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that, whilst higher level qualifications are preferred and promoted by the CDI, they do not necessarily define practitioners who can offer services without them. This lack of clarity on who has what qualifications, and the fact that practitioners can offer services without a level 6 qualification, has always been a defining weakness of the profession in England. In relation to developing my thesis, a question that arose during the process of data analysis, and in formulating my model of professional identity: that is, the extent to which those with *lower* qualifications, e.g., the NVQ in Advice and Guidance, felt less professionally identified and professional, in comparison to those with the QCG?

A further dimension which adds to the complexity of this debate concerning legally-enshrined entry requirements concerns the four nations of the UK, and their different executive and legislative structures. The professional bodies have never managed to convince successive governments in England that a minimum level 6 qualification should be a legal requirement for practice. However, careers guidance practitioners who deliver guidance for Skills

Development Scotland must have a level 7 Masters Qualification in the subject. Careers Wales has committed to the level 6 qualification; while qualification provision in Northern Ireland has been affected by the closure of the QCG course at the University of Ulster.

A professional trait that careers guidance does display is that the CDI now owns, and can thus define and revise the National Occupational Standards (NOS) (UKCES, 2015). That said, the professional body in trying to be inclusive, and attract as many members as possible, have entitled the standards as concerning career development. The aim is that the standards will thus apply to roles such as career coaches and career educators, not just careers guidance practitioners.

As raised in section 2.2.1., this recurring issue of nomenclature, and what a particular role title signifies, illustrates an on-going defining trait of the profession. That is, the persisting uncertainty in identifying and defining what careers guidance comprises, and for whom, and in which organisational setting. And this, in part, reminds us of the genesis of this research: does the variety of role names above indicate (or indeed result in) a contingent, fragmented profession (if it can still be called that) with varying degrees of entry requirements, and thus lacking any real, shared sense of professional identity?

The following sections consider the ways in which provision in certain settings has developed historically; and how this can be viewed through the lenses of trait, functionalist and power considerations. The issues discussed in this chapter so far – what is careers guidance? For whom? And what it is called, and by whom? – are amplified when the somewhat unforgiving concepts of status and power are applied to the profession.

2.4 The historical development and organisational structures of careers guidance

This section critically analyses the developments of careers guidance, its services (in part as these illustrate both the functions and traits of the profession), and the organisational settings and structures in which the profession has operated. Establishing the details of these settings will also link to, and inform, subsequent sections that consider the relationships between practitioners and their organisations or, as in relation to structuration, the interplay between agency and structure. It is this thesis' contention that it is the precise nature of these settings that, in part, provide the frameworks for professional identity to grow and develop. And in relation to the aims of my thesis, this context specificity challenges the discourse concerning the profession and its practitioners that, in my view, too readily assume powerlessness and an ontology-in-general (Stones, 2005).

The following sections consider how careers guidance has developed and operated in each educational setting for the benefits of particular client groups. It begins with schools and young people, before then moving onto considering FE, HE and adult guidance settings.

2.4.1 Schools: Early Twentieth Century: matching the needs of industry

The roots of careers guidance internationally are surprisingly long, and were stimulated to grow initially by functional demands. For example, the expansion of the industrial society in Europe and the USA led in part to the need for employers to ensure that the supply of labour was matched to their requirements. This in turn helped to promote the development of vocational psychology, especially in the USA, which enabled talent matching to occur, where an individual's capabilities were assessed and then matched against job criteria (Brown and Lent, 2013).

In Great Britain, governments' and employers' concerns with finding the right people for the right job did not just focus on recruiting adults into work. In the early part of the

twentieth century, employment exchanges were established in 1909, a move strengthened by the Education Act (1910) which gave local education authorities (LEAs) the power to set up employment bureau for young people (Ranson and Ribbens, 1988). Whilst this service may have appeared similar to an employment agency, slotting young people into available jobs, Peck (2004) notes that the officers were centred on the needs of their clients, and were keen to cultivate appropriate decision-making.

This function of matching of young people to jobs, whilst also remaining client-centred, was also accompanied by another growing aspect of two further developing *traits* of a profession: an increasing sense of professional expertise based on a developing body of knowledge; and a more conscious professional identity. Thus, there was a growing interest in applying the developments in vocational psychology to vocational guidance; and the arrival of a new professional body: the National Association of Juvenile Employment and Welfare Officers (NAJEWO) in 1922 in England (Ibid.). The latter development should not be underestimated in the way in which it signalled the extent to which these early vocational guidance professionals were collectively conscious enough to establish a national association which could represent their interests and those of their clients.

Inevitably, however, this apparently positive indication of the professionals' early sense of power and recognition for the importance of their work was accompanied by an ambiguity that has persisted until today. That is, the competing territorial claims of central and local government on what was then termed vocational guidance (Ranson and Ribbens, 1988). Indeed, each key piece of legislation throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first has both exemplified and amplified this ambiguity; and the ways in which vocational and then careers guidance services have swung between central or local control, or a mixture of both, with the accompanying development of service hybrids and varying national dimensions. It can be argued that this lack of a stable governmental home in England, so to speak, has resulted

in (and been symptomatic of) constantly re-organised service contexts with which practitioners have had to contend. These changes have led to shifting horizons for action (Stones, 2005) that are considered further in the next chapter, and in the discussion chapter six.

2.4.2 Schools: Post Second World War Settlement

The next piece of really crucial legislation for vocational/careers guidance was the Employment and Training Act (1948), which established the Youth Employment Service in the UK (Heginbotham, 1951). Politically, it recognised the importance of guidance to the rebuilding of society after the Second World War (Peck, 2004). LEAs in England were given the legal authority to provide both advice and placement services – state-mediated traits that have again persisted until today (though the placement services had fallen away by the 1990s). Part of what is significant about this act for the profession was the recognition of the importance of *advice* not just placement (Killeen and Kidd, 1996) – or, more accurately, the need to discuss with clients their wishes and aspirations, not just their role in meeting the needs of employers and government policy. Again, this form of client-centredness as a trait seems to have been supported by government.

However (and there is always a caveat in such legislative developments) the LEAs were given a choice as to whether or not they wanted to run the service (Ranson and Ribbens, 1988) – a fudge which of course meant that some opted not to, so that of 163 authorities, 129 decided to offer the service, while 34 did not, leaving the service in those areas to be administered by the Ministry of Labour (Peck, 2004). Whilst it may be tempting to tie causal links to previous events with the benefit of hindsight, the fact that services and their organisational base were allowed to vary reached its nadir in the mid-2000s, with variations in services and their configurations reflecting a fragmented service pattern for young people in England (Watts and MacGowan, 2007). Indeed, the Education Act (2011) and its transfer of statutory duties to

schools in England, has simply shattered the broken service pattern further, as the highly critical Ofsted Report (2013) noted in its review of the consistency and quality of careers guidance provision in schools in England.

A further indicator of the political and functional importance with which government viewed the service (despite the fudge) was the extent of the bureaucratic control exerted on the service. Heginbotham (1951) gave detailed descriptions of the governmental overview of the service, e.g. the ways in which the Central Youth Employment Executive oversaw the service but also adopted the Ince Committee's recommendations concerning the recruitment and training of staff, professional standards, and, importantly, 'the promotion and encouragement of research.' (Ibid: 138). These aspects indicated the seriousness with which government viewed the contribution of the service to the effective use of young people's skills in the economy. The promotion of research also shows the Committee's concerns with developing the knowledge base of practitioners' work (Larson, 1977); in this way, it was not seen simply as slotting square pegs into square holes, but also with enhancing one of the core activities of a profession: generating knowledge (Millerson, 1964).

It could be argued here that the service had a strong and developing basis of professionalism: a strong and growing professional identity, as well as some leverage and power in acting as a gatekeeper for matching young people to jobs. Despite subsequent legislative and political changes, and ongoing challenges to the profession, these traits and professional strengths have also persisted to the present day, e.g. in the ways in which expertise in labour market information, and the importance of the evidence base for practice, as well as client-centredness, feature in the current National Occupational Standards.

Interestingly, and in relation to the knowledge base, the ways in which new ideas began to influence vocational/careers guidance also started to question the existing theoretical basis

for client work. Super adapted developmental psychology to produce a developmental model of guidance (1963) that took account of more humanistic approaches which acknowledged the potential and capacity of clients to affect their own choices (Watts, 1996). His work was also reinforced by Daws (1966) who proposed that vocational/careers guidance was not simply a one-off match as young people left school, but should be a continual process, and take into consideration the ways in which clients' needs, values, skills, and perspectives may develop, rather than simply their need for a job. Peck (2004) claims that the effect of such new ideas was to make talent matching seem increasingly limiting, even reactionary, and concerned more with the relative power of the practitioner in judging the suitability of a client for a job – surely a process that invited stereotypical assumptions about the right jobs for boys and girls.

This phase of the profession's development, in terms of its knowledge base and government-recognised function, was set against a period of relative prosperity and social change during the 1950s and 1960s. One such social change that had implications for the service was the raising of the school leaving age up to 15 in 1944, and then finally to 16 in 1972 (Ranson and Ribbens, 1988). The school system underwent major changes, too, e.g. with the establishing of the tripartite system in England of grammar schools, secondary technical schools and secondary moderns; and then with the arrival of comprehensive schools in 1965 (Aldrich, 2002). These developments meant that guidance practitioners in England needed to recognise (and perhaps ameliorate) the ways in which the different schools helped to shape young people's sense of their options. Crucially, though, for the services overall placement function, was the fact that there were jobs and apprenticeships (as well as further study options) for young people to move into (Roberts, 1995). This functional basis of the profession's power and leverage was soon to be re-examined as Britain's industrial base began to decline, and youth unemployment as a 'new' phenomenon developed (Grint, 2010).

2.4.3 Schools: The settling of Post-Industrialism and its implications for vocational/careers guidance

As the service entered the 1970s, the two previous decades have seen the development of the Youth Employment Service; its government-backed function and leverage in advice and placement services; its developing theoretical and knowledge base; and thus its basis towards professionalism. Indeed, it appeared that the next piece of relevant legislation in 1973, the Employment and Training Act, and the guidance issued to LEAs in England and Wales in 1974, appeared to offer some further professional closure (MacDonald, 1995) by establishing a firmer administrative base for the service in LEAs. The shift, too, from Youth Employment Service to the Careers Service, with the new role of Careers Officers (Peck, 2004) was also a significant change in the profession and the sense of what it was. The change of name perhaps showed the influence of the developmental ideas of Super (1963) and Daws (1966) which had rejected the idea of a one-off, vocational match, in favour of supporting the development of clients' lifelong careers. That said, it is important to note that careers offices had not yet abandoned a cornerstone of their work: finding employment for young people (Ranson and Ribbens, 1988).

However, structural economic changes as the 1970s progressed into the 1980s posed challenges both to the expertise and leverage that the Careers Service had acquired to a large extent in the previous decades. Roberts' attack on the developmental ideas of career choice (1971) considerably sharpened as the decade went on (1977), where he identified the socio-economics of career outcomes; and that structural disadvantages, communicated through societal institutions such as the family and education, were far more powerful determinants of the destinations of young people than notions of personal choice. In this way, the net effect of careers officers roles was to help young people to adjust to their pre-determined job or education outcomes – thereby being consistent with the conservative ideology identified by

Watts (1996) – and at more extreme level, a further effect was that officers helped to transmit dominant societal discourses about ‘why working class kids get working class jobs’ (Willis, 1977: 1).

A conclusion that may be drawn from this argument is that the Careers Service colluded with the way in which structural expectations and disadvantages were transmitted through culture – in this, the language of opportunities and finding jobs – to then constrain individual action (Thompson, 2012). Such a conclusion is a rather bleak take on Durkheim’s (1957) more positive view of professions as acting as sources of moral coherence for a society. The compelling nature of Roberts’ critique, was borne out by the decline in structural employment opportunities, and the rise of unemployment, especially youth unemployment by the early 1980s (Roberts et al., 1987). Two of the profession’s major traits and sources of professional power – its knowledge base and job matching function – were thus threatened by the decline in Britain’s position as an industrial, prosperous nation.

Interestingly, however, the rise in unemployment led in part to the government recasting the Careers Service’s functional role so that it became the means by which the Youth Opportunities Scheme (YOP) and then the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) operated (Peck, 2004). This structural role was confirmed by the Memorandum of Guidance in 1980 (Ranson and Ribbens, 1988), where the broad aim of the service to help the transition of young people from school or college to employment or training was confirmed. Of course, the governmental fudge of having competing services running similar services was in evidence during this period of the early eighties, with the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) running a similar service to the Careers Service in terms of placing young people into jobs (Peck, 2004).

If the policy direction and expectations of the Careers Service appeared to confirm its structural function, i.e. reduce youth unemployment, then the theme of practitioner agency and

sense of professionalism and identity also persisted. Watts (1984; 1984a) as a powerful and influential advocate for the service at that time, was clear about the need for guidance as well as opportunities. The former enabled clients to take more advantage of the opportunities that were available to them; and again, stressing the fact that, increasingly, people would need to make a series of career choices throughout their working lives as structural certainties were vanishing. The Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) – note the nomenclature here, with the emphasis on guidance – was also vocal in stating that the MSC services did not provide the kind of guidance and individual support that clients needed, unlike careers guidance practitioners (Peck, 2004). In addition, far from being cultural dopes (Giddens, 1984), practitioners who were charged with making the YTS process work expressed ethical tensions experienced when trying to meet service targets and meeting the guidance needs of young people (Ransom and Ribbens, 1988). Indeed, such was the strength of the ICG's message on behalf of its members, MSC officials noted that service staff were 'overly biased towards counselling rather than placements in employment. An adherence to professional autonomy was also thought to inhibit effective management of the service' (Ibid: 14). This statement was but one indicator of the shift towards the kind of 'new accountability' that accompanied the impact of New Right Thinking on public services (Banks, 2004).

2.4.4 Schools: privatisation: skills and employment

If careers guidance was viewed by the MSC (and thus government) as too focussed on the needs of practitioners (or, the agents), then the impact of the New Right Thinking that accompanied the Thatcher governments of the 1980s (Alcock and Daly, 2008), served as a functional corrective. This was signalled by a government White Paper, *Working Together* (1987), which also represented the influence of policy developments in the USA, most notably the ways in which schools, colleges and employers cooperated to form compact progression agreements (Peck 2004). The perceived need to involve businesses more closely in education

and skills development led to the set-up of the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in 1990 – a strong signal to local authorities that their role in local economic development was not seen as important as previously (Ibid.)

This questioning of local authorities' role more generally also implicated LEAs in their delivery of careers guidance. Reviews in the early 1990s critically examined the service's functional role in developing skills and securing employment for young people (Watts, 1991). Further, the government believed that involving employers in the TEC would facilitate the adoption of market principles, so that the Careers Service would develop advice and placement services more effectively. As a result, the Trade Union and Employment Act in 1993 established this new policy direction where organisations would be invited to tender to run careers guidance services, and with three possible scenarios envisaged: a fully privatised service; a TEC run service; or (and with the now familiar fudge) a TEC/LEA operated agreement (Peck, 2004). Ann Widdecombe as the new Education Secretary made it clear the functions she expected the service to fulfil: develop economic prosperity; adopting more effective and business-like processes; and driving up standards (Widdecombe, 1994). Part of this new functional accountability (Banks, 2004) was indicated by the introduction of more business-like performance indicators (Killeen and Kidd, 1996) – again, signifying the requirement for practitioners to be less concerned with counselling services and professional autonomy, and more organisational accountabilities (Evetts, 2005).

Overall, this period of change in the early to later 1990s indicated that the functional expectation of careers guidance was to secure employment, education or training outcomes for young people. However, as Watts (1996) and Peck (2004) indicated above, the traits of the profession seemed to continue, not least in providing information, advice and guidance services, and careers education programmes in schools. It could be argued, too, that the literature concerning the historical and structural development of careers guidance in England

has concentrated on political and structural shifts, while tending to overlook the role that practitioners have played in helping to shape and influence their organisational contexts. This focus – and limitation – of the literature continues with the introduction of the Connexions service in 2001. This functional development was not just a most radical re-orientation of the function of careers guidance; the entire structure and identity of the service, and its practitioners, was changed in ways that highlighted the lack of structural power and leverage of the profession.

2.4.5 Schools: New Connexions: New Labour's attempt at tackling social exclusion amongst young people

The early signals sent to the profession by the arrival of the New Labour government in 1997 did not look especially promising. For instance, Baroness Blackstone expressed her view to the ICG's conference in 1998 (Peck, 2004) that careers guidance should serve socially excluded young people more effectively – indeed, that its services made little impact in any case on those whose social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1989) produced predictable job or education outcomes, e.g. those who attended elite schools would usually progress to elite universities with or without the intervention of careers adviser. The clear indication that careers guidance should shift its societal function, from employment and skills to tackling social disadvantage, was made a reality by the now-infamous report, *Bridging the Gap*, produced by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 1999). This proposed the need for a multi-skilled service to meet the holistic needs of young people, not simply their careers needs. The term 'Connexions' was coined for this type of provision, and it would offer a full service to thirteen to nineteen year olds in England, including personal, welfare and almost social work type help (Watts, 2001).

The practical implications for careers guidance were far-reaching; and they show how such state-mediated public services are relatively powerless to prevent policies from scything through services. The structural, political and cultural re-alignments, and effects on practitioner motivation were dramatic (Bolman and Deal, 2003). The most obvious change was the new name: Connexions; and no longer the careers services. The resulting structural change was that the services had to reform themselves as Connexions Services, e.g. Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions; and Birmingham and Solihull Connexions. Again, some facets of the previous organisations were retained, e.g. in having Chief Executive Officers (CEOs); but the appointments to these roles were highly politicised, e.g. the extent to which previous managers of careers services were passed over in preference for those from youth work background in order to cement the shift away from careers guidance.

Next, structurally, symbolically (Ibid.) and in terms of professional identity were the changes to job titles and roles. The role of the Personal Adviser in schools replaced that of the careers adviser. Watts (2001a) noted the difficulties that erupted in trying to define what the role should cover, e.g. the balance between intensive support for those at risk of becoming NEET, through to careers guidance for those who were more mainstream; and the confusions experienced by schools in trying to reconcile this new role into their organisation. And as Watts (2014) came to reflect accurately, this tension between the targeted role and somehow needing to cover a more universal role for all young people was never satisfactorily resolved, and led to inconsistent and patchy services that varied by local authority area.

A key, additional structural and cultural change (Bolman and Deal, 2003) concerned professional training. Perhaps one of the most key aspects of careers guidance's professional traits (and power) was the acceptance (but not an absolute legal requirement) of a professional qualification for careers advisers to work in schools in England. This was the Diploma in Careers Guidance (DipCG), owned and validated by the Local Government Management

Training Board (LGMTB), and which had two components: one year studying in a university or college of higher education to obtain part one; and then a further year as a probationary trainee under the guidance of a practice supervisor. Both parts were expected, though not legally required, for advisers to work in schools. If part of a profession's goal is to be able to control and regulate entry to practice, and the professional curriculum (Larson, 1977), then careers guidance had partly achieved this (if only for schools); FE and HE had other requirements which will be considered later in this part.

The arrival of Connexions chopped the qualification and professional entry requirements into organisationally contingent pieces that simply added to the confusion noted by Watts (2001a) above. The Diploma for Personal Advisers was conceived and introduced quickly for those who were newly recruited into the role; and, interestingly, did not require the same level of higher level entry requirements as for the DipCG (DfEE, 2000) – though the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) framework was labelled 'professional'. It is likely that this was consistent with the government's apparent concerns that careers guidance practitioners were not diverse enough to reflect the socially excluded constituents they should have been serving (Peck, 2004). Connexions services were thus expected to recruit those from non-traditional educational backgrounds who (perhaps) could 'connect' more readily with those who required more holistic support. Those former careers advisers who held the DipCG would need to undergo a short course 'Understanding Connexions' (DfEE, 2000) in order to orientate (or re-programme) themselves to the new service. There were some crumbs of comfort for the profession, in that it managed to retain a higher level qualification, the Qualification in Careers guidance (QCG), the delivery of which was retained by those HEIs who had run the DipCG formerly. However, in terms of professional traits and power, careers guidance had more or less lost one of its key assets: the acceptance by schools that advisers needed the DipCG.

Confusion, ambiguity, different roles, varying service levels, rapidly morphing qualifications, and yet more legislation: these seemed to characterise New Labour's rather manic approach to providing information, advice and guidance services for young people. The log flume of policies concerning children and young people illustrates this point: Every Child Matters (2003); Youth Matters (2005); the set-up of Children's Trusts, which then relocated the statutory provision for providing careers support to young people back with local authorities, but under another new banner – Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS). The structural effects were to produce varying organisational realignments depending on which part of England the young person resided (Watts and MacGowan, 2007). For example, some areas had private trusts operating the service; some had services that had been re-integrated back into local authorities, e.g. Birmingham and Solihull Connexions, which had been the largest service in England, was divided and relocated back into the respective local governments; while others had Connexions companies, such as CSWP Ltd., which ran Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions. For young people, this could mean that they had access to a school-based practitioner, as with the previous careers service; or a brief talk from a Personal Adviser whose interview time tended to focussed on those who were at risk of being NEET; or a very brief interview in year 11 where if your destination was relatively clear than you were deemed sorted without much need for further input.

Returning to the theme of qualifications, then yet more structural changes were put into effect. Presumably realising the drastic shortcomings of the Diploma for Personal Advisers, both in terms of its length and content, the government introduced the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in (sic) Advice and Guidance (IAG) at level 4 – noting the absence of the word careers. This was then accompanied by the NVQ 4 in Learning Development and Support Services (LDSS), which was aimed at youth workers who had been moved into personal adviser roles and who did not have backgrounds in careers guidance; at the same time,

Connexions Services would still commission places on QCG courses...leading to practitioners at varying levels of qualifications and expertise (and indeed orientation – the QCG was, after all, still concerned with careers guidance) with the ICG rather impotent and unable to specify exactly what qualifications were required to deliver careers services (Watts and MacGowan, 2007).

2.4.6 The emergence of gloomy and deterministic discourses concerning the profession, its practitioners, and professional power and identity

In what ways did practitioners experience the effects of these dramatic changes on their sense of professionalism and identity?

Initially, some of evidence and indicators illustrate the prevalence of the negative discourses that suggested the relative powerless of the practitioners in schools. Early studies such as Watts's (2001a) point to the effects of structural and role confusion on practitioners' sense of professional well-being, e.g. higher caseloads, discomfort in taking on additional roles for which they had not been trained, and ethical tensions with regard to confidentiality and impartiality. Artaraz (2006) invoked Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence to suggest that the professional habitus, formed by careers guidance based training and values, had been violated by Connexions' concern with reducing NEET rates and by a prevailing culture that sought to denigrate the old service as being irrelevant to young people. Bourdieu's concept is an interesting one to use, since it examines not only the ways in one class asserts its power over another symbolically, but also that those who are less powerful are also complicit in the process (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This would imply that, in Artaraz's view, the careers guidance practitioners had similarly accepted the dominance of Connexion's aims and practices – a view that this thesis contests. Reid (2007) explored the discourses regarding new supervisory structures which, as her study revealed, tended towards performance management

and hitting targets, rather than supportive, collegial discussions that could have helped practitioners deal with, or simply reflect on and learn from, complex cases.

Perhaps the most critical was the report by Colley and colleagues (2010). This spoke in passionate terms of the de-skilling and de-professionalising effects of Connexions, including pressure to hit targets; compromised impartiality caused by managerialist practices, e.g. Personal Advisers expected to push young people towards certain training courses in order to hit NEET targets; and a strong sense expressed by those who took part in the survey of a diminished professional identity. At the same time, the report did highlight some of the participants' creative agency in seeking to mitigate the effects of the new roles, e.g. tolerating a 'partial unbecoming' (Ibid: 20) where they sought to reconcile some of the aspects of their previous role as careers adviser with the strictures of the new one.

However, as the report considers, the danger of such partial unbecoming involved the kind of ethical drift discussed by Cribb (2005) where practitioners slowly give in to the constant concern with meeting and managing targets; and so become primarily organisationally accountable (Broadbent et al., 1997) rather than professionally focussed. It is worth noting that the participants in this research who reported such disillusion tended to come from DipCG, careers advice backgrounds; and so perhaps were bound to experience such negative effects. Those who were 'not becoming' (Colley et al., 2010: 20), i.e., those who had entered Connexions and so had never become careers advisers, may have expressed a different view of the service.

In the face of such evidence, it is perhaps not surprising to encounter studies that are concerned with definitional exercises (Johnson, 1972), such as Mulvey (2013), Hughes (2013a) and Neary (2014). These consider how practitioners can reclaim, redefine, and simply cope with considerable policy and organisational change, e.g. by taking personal responsibility for

nourishing their inner sense of professional identity and growth. Indeed, career resilience for careers guidance practitioners has been considered as an important dimension of practice, both in helping clients and practitioners (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012). Subsequent chapters consider these aspects of creative agency in more detail; but again these studies show the continuing interest in, and importance of, practitioner development and identity in the face of considerable change.

What tends to characterise much of this literature is a focus on the negative impacts of policy and organisational change on practitioners. The view of structures in this context is that they are overwhelming and overpowering (Mackey, 2007) with little room for the kind of insights and creative agency that Stones (2005) proposed as way of considering the actual relationships between agency and structure. The relationship suggested by Artaraz (2006) and Colley and colleagues (2010) is almost an abusive one, where practitioners have few choices other than to leave their roles, or find ways of coping in sub-optimal circumstances. In relation to the latter point, it is interesting that the research of Colley and colleagues (2010) focussed on practitioners who had been careers advisers: as if they could not express anything other than dissatisfaction with the shift to Connexions. As the data presentation and analysis chapter considers, a number of the participants had experienced several role changes and yet still demonstrated a strength of identity in their work that challenges such a gloomy view. Further, it could be argued that practitioners' adaptation to, and engagement with, change is couched only in terms of ethical drift and unbecoming (Ibid.), instead of agents exercising their assets in seeking to shape processes and create new or enhanced professional meanings. A final point here is that the discourses considered above seem to be rather nostalgic for an ideal time for the profession before the disruption of Connexions; whereas as this chapter has critically discussed, there has been no time when careers guidance practitioners have not had to contend with functionalist expectations that both constrained and challenged practice and identity. This is

perhaps the most curious limitation of this literature: that in apparently criticising government policy for its managerialist, disempowering effects, the writers concerned seem to promote a perspective that overlooks the actual ways in which practitioners engage in everyday practices.

2.4.7 Schools: the swing back to careers guidance...and the Education Act (2011)

As is evident above, Connexions radically changed the functional expectations of careers guidance, its traits as a profession, and (so aspects of the literature claim) practitioners' professional identity. The advent of the new Coalition government in 2010 marked the start of yet more functional and structural changes that have been as far-reaching on the profession in England. Just as Baroness Blackstone had done at the start of the New Labour years, the shadow minister for education and science, David Willetts, signalled these changes when addressing the ICG conference at Blackpool in 2009. He declared that an in-coming Conservative government would split careers guidance away from Connexions to re-establish its importance and profile. Even within New Labour there were mutterings that the service was no longer effective: Milburn's report (2009) was critical of the service's inability to tackle inequalities of access to the professions, even to the extent of branding the service an expensive failure.

However, the reality of the new changes introduced by the Coalition government only added new flavours to what now seems a familiar recipe for service re-organisation and esteem. As Watts (2014) pointed out, any flickers of hope curried by Willetts' address to the ICG conference in 2009 were quickly extinguished by the implementation of the Education Act (2011). This transferred statutory duties to schools in England for careers guidance, but with a key modification that was indicative of the Department of Education's policy move to transfer power (and accountabilities) to schools. The duty on schools was to provide access to impartial and high quality careers information, advice and guidance, not necessarily to provide it; in

other words, schools in line with the new policy mood music, were free to make arrangements in line with the best needs of the organisation. Such apparent empowerment came without the crucial means to translate organisational choices into reality: namely, money. Again, as Watts (2014) noted, the money that had funded Connexions was absorbed into wider government. This, in his view, amounted to a betrayal of the pre-election promises made by the Conservative party.

Thus, the variety of services models that appeared under the Children's Trust arrangements (Watts and MacGowan, 2007) seemed positively coherent when compared to the picture of inconsistent and fragmented services painted by Ofsted (2013). Wider austerity, pressure on school budgets, more pressing performance indicators concerning GSCE grades, and simple lack of understanding of careers guidance, meant that any attempts by former Connexions services to interest schools in their services simply fell on stony ground. As Hughes's (2013b) heat map shows, some schools managed to retain the services of a qualified careers practitioner, e.g. in Coventry, most of the schools re-employed directly the former Connexions Personal Adviser, albeit on reduced hours; while others relied on put-upon teachers to cobble together a programme. A further reduction of provision in schools was the Act's removal of any obligation on schools to run careers education programmes. Interestingly, the Connexions service was not formally abolished, but was rather left to wither on the vine; this did mean that a handful of services managed to continue, e.g. Sandwell Connexions and Oxford Connexions, providing targeted services to those who were most at risk of being NEET (the responsibility for whom had been left with local authorities).

As part of the recurring pattern, however, there were aspects that created a more mixed picture regarding careers guidance, its practitioners and the profession's development. For example, the Silver Review (DfE, 2010) restated the need for a strong, professional service, with a clear, unambiguous voice for professionals, and the strong preference for a minimum

level 6 qualification for those delivering careers guidance. Thus, the ICG, Association of Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG), National Association of Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA) and the Association of Careers Professionals (ACPi – UK) merged to form the CDI in April 2013. The new institute's aims of growing its membership, being the representative voice of career development practitioners in the UK, developing the professional register, and lobbying for minimum professional standards, demonstrate a renewed attempt at aspects of the professional project (Larson, 1977).

In addition, and as noted earlier, the ownership of the NOS for career development by the CDI is indicative of some power being returned to the profession. However, and once again, the picture must be equivocal, since AGCAS elected not to join the CDI – much to the disapprobation of those who had heralded the new body as a major step forward (Watts, 2014). In addition, the National Careers Service for England was created in April 2012 (BIS, 2012), with accompanying new Level 6 Diploma in Careers guidance and Development. Whilst this development will be considered later in this chapter, when we examine the formation of adult guidance services, it is worth noting here that the service was also meant to be available to young people, too.

Finally for careers guidance services for schools, the impact of the careers and enterprise service for schools (DfE, 2015) remains to be seen. An interesting aspect of this service is that it loops back to part of the traits of the vocational/careers service up until the 1990s: strong links with employers. However, and as commentators have pointed out historically, (e.g. Watts, 1984), advice and guidance need to accompany information provided by employers since, as Sampson and colleagues (1999) indicate, information can raise as many career questions as it solves. In addition, statutory guidance to schools (DfE, 2015) also acknowledges the issues raised by the Ofsted report in 2013, and seeks to strengthen the duties placed on schools, e.g. requiring them to have a clear strategy for implementing high quality

and impartial careers guidance. Whether these more recent structural and legislative indicators of the importance of careers guidance to schools and young people in England will result in a recovery for the profession also remains to be seen.

This section has critically considered the development of careers guidance provision for young people in schools in England since the early 1900s. It is clear that major legislation concerning employment and education have made dramatic impacts on the planning, provision and esteem of careers guidance services, both positively, e.g. just after the Second World War, and catastrophically, with the advent of Connexions in 2001. It is also clear that successive governments have not quite decided whether the service should be locally or centrally controlled, with the most recent development placing statutory duties into schools, creating the kind of fragmented and contingent services criticised heavily by Ofsted (2013). The gains for the profession, too, with the rise of the ICG, and the creation of the DipCG as an accepted (though not compulsory) requirement for the practice of statutory guidance, were radically changed by New Labour as its frantic flume of policies concerning young people's services was finally derailed in 2010. Any hopes that the Coalition government would make good Willetts's pre-election promises concerning careers guidance simply faded as funding to meet the new duties of the Education Act (2011) vanished.

In relation to the concerns of this thesis – particularly the negative discourses that appear to define the debate about the function and identity of careers guidance – then it is tempting to view the profession as it exists in schools as a battered, de-professionalised one. The data analysis and discussion chapters five and six will critically examine the validity of this view. In addition, part of the aims of the research is to explore the extent to which there is a common, shared identity amongst practitioners whatever the delivery and client context and type.

We will therefore now consider the provision of services in FE, HE, and adult and community settings.

2.5 Provision in Further Education, Higher Education and adult and community settings

2.5.1 Further Education

A major structural difference between services for schools and those in FE (and also HE) is that the careers guidance services exist inside the institution and not as a separate body, as the Careers Service and Connexions did (and which schools therefore brought or bought in). This creates different service structures, orientations and a different sense of professionalism (though there are commonalities with services in schools and HE). An historical point is worth noting, too, concerning the qualification requirements for careers guidance practitioners in FE and HE. Unlike those in schools who were expected to have the DipCG until the advent of Connexions – and the subsequent recommendation of the Silver Review (DfE, 2010) for a minimum level 6 qualification – those who work in FE and HE have not been subject to any formal requirement for career guidance qualifications (Hawthorne, 1996; Butler and Dane, 2007). This is particularly so for services in HE, as section 2.5.2 below discusses.

These differences and overlaps are apparent when key legislation regarding education, training and employment is considered. Just as the Youth Employment Service was created as part of the post-war settlement, then FE colleges as we would recognise them today were created by the Education Act in 1944, where Mechanics Institutes, Art Colleges and so on were combined together into single institutions that were also spread across multiple sites. FE colleges' role in developing the skills of the workforce was evident in their involvement in Industrial Training Boards in 1960s (Hawthorne, 1996). Educational policy developments in the late 1980s, culminating in the 1988 Reform Act, gave both FE and Polytechnics

independence from local authority control; and confirmed colleges' function in the skills' agenda, with the rapid growth in National Vocational qualifications (Ibid.)

As a result, FE colleges' student body were heterogeneous, covering 16 – 19 education, as well as adult education, sub-degree semi- and vocational courses such as National and Higher National certificates and diplomas, and full-time as well as part-time students. This was very different to schools, where the clients' variability in terms of educational stage and career needs was likely to be more limited. As a result, Hawthorne (Ibid: 114) noted, 'there can be no single response to careers work in this sector.' Indeed, Marks (1975) noted that careers guidance services in FE were significantly less well developed than in schools, in terms of consistency of qualified staff, careers education, and a more conscious sense of professionalism and connection with communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Service models that developed were also more organisationally-contingent, too, but with some links beyond the colleges to other careers guidance professionals. The relevance of considering these models in some detail is that the context with which practitioners have contended and engaged is clarified. Stoney and Scott (1984) identified two prevailing models in the early eighties: one which drew on similar practice in schools, where the guidance practitioner would run a cross-college model, with services such as interviews, group work and information resources, as well as links to employers; or the other, where a careers co-ordinator who was not qualified in careers guidance would offer and/or organise careers events at certain key stages, e.g. when students wanted to apply to higher education. As colleges expanded, and newer service models developed, such as 'Student Services' (which was also seen in HE), then the variety of careers guidance services' locations also increased, with the Further Education Unit (FEU, 1994) offering a typology of four types of service platforms. Firstly, an integrated model, usually within Student Services functions such as welfare and counselling – though this model also increased the likelihood of careers guidance practitioners being pulled into pre-entry

guidance that may cause ethical issues, where colleges expect student services to help recruit students. Next, a dispersed one, with practitioners operating without being linked to other student-facing services; followed by an informal one, where no identified service existed, and guidance being offered in an ad-hoc fashion by tutors; and finally, a more formal, tutor-led system similar to the one described above, where tutors had formal careers duties, often resulting in careers fairs or talks. As Hawthorne (1996) pointed out, the Student Services model was tending to predominate from the mid-1990s onwards, with staff expected to cover pre-entry, on course and exit guidance roles.

This picture may have created the impression that in the eighties and nineties, careers services in FE were a kind of Cinderella service, partially buried in Student Services and expected to play an organisationally accountable role – in other words, less professional than their schools' counterparts. However, the views expressed by my research participants from FE run somewhat counter to this impression; this counter-argument will be examined more fully in the data discussion chapter. Indeed, FE experienced considerable expansion with the advent of the New Labour administration in 1997, and was charged with developing functional and vocational skills, the targets for which were set out by the new Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in England as created by the Learning and Skills Act (2000). The focus on the nation's skills was amplified by the Leitch Review (2006). Careers guidance provision in FE reflected in part this new policy climate as well as the creation of the Connexions Service. Thus, services for 16 – 19 year olds in FE colleges were provided by the Connexions Service, which would be co-located with the colleges' own service (usually located in Student Services as discussed above) that would focus on other learners, as well as retaining a focus on providing support for UCAS applications (which the Connexions Service did not cover). This co-location of services appeared to continue until the Education Act (2011) and funding changes led to the dramatic shrinkage of Connexions, leaving colleges faced with a number of

delivery options to meet this apparent shortfall in services to a particular age group of the student body.

As a result, the Association of Colleges (2012) commissioned a report which considered existing models of provision in FE and the extent to which the new National Careers Service (NCS) could plug the gap left by Connexions. My professional experience of placing QCG students in FE colleges in the Midlands (covering counties such as Warwickshire, West Midlands, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Oxfordshire), tends to show how services are having to make do with the same college-based staffing complement that existed when Connexions was co-located in the organisation. This usually results in a keen focus on supporting key college priorities, such as recruitment, progression and achievement; and thus the services are expected to be organisationally orientated (Evetts, 2005), even if (as my data analysis shows) practitioners may adopt ethically subversive tactics (Artaraz, 2006) to promote client-centred services.

What is also clear is that such anecdotal evidence, whilst in some respects quite rich and rooted in professional practice, only points up the need for more comprehensive and rigorous research into careers provision in colleges – especially as the latest statutory guidance from the DfE (2015) expects them to secure independent and impartial careers guidance.

2.5.2 Higher Education

The history and development of provision in Higher Education reflects different traditions, policies and professionalism, although again there are some overlaps particularly in the former shared LEA governance of FE colleges and Polytechnics. The binary divide between the ‘traditional universities’ and the ‘old polys’, with further divergences between institutions reflected in the growth of sub-groups such as the Russell Group, the Million + group, the Universities Alliance, and the Cathedrals Group (UUK, 2015), also creates different

service structures and orientations. As a result, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) faces a perennially challenging task of representing a common voice from its membership.

That said, the genesis of what may be now recognised as a careers service was in some ways similar to the functional expectations of the Youth Employment Service (YES), albeit decades apart. Watts (1996) identified the growth of appointments boards as a result of the Heyworth report as far back as 1892, with their functions covering information and advisory interviews; information provision; and, most crucially, in terms of their expert power (MacDonald, 1995), job placement services – and hence the name, appointments boards, since they had a gatekeeping function between the HEI and the graduate employer. Castor offered a fascinating glimpse into a system which is at once hard to imagine (and yet whose echo may still be felt today), where up until the 1960s, such boards fulfilled a function, the passing of which is expressed almost in regretful terms:

‘...employers have always wanted and still, *in petto*, would like. It can be summarised as an informal network of contacts, large enough to offer a choice of appropriate candidates, small enough to maintain a personal relationship with those whose judgements are trusted...a comfort zone that is no longer politically correct but whose loss, when discussing recruitment costs and the ability of staff, is often regretted.’

(Butler and Dane, 2007: 22)

Service personnel in this era were thus often drawn from such networks: previous graduate recruiters, or industry types (Castor himself worked for ICI before moving to the appointments board at the University of London). Their esoteric body of expertise (Larson,

1977), so to speak, lay in their understanding of, and access to, graduate recruitment networks. It did not, at this stage, lay in vocational or careers guidance qualifications.

This basis of expertise began to shift as the ideas of Super (1957), Rogers (1961) and Daws (1966) began to influence HE practitioners in the same way as they had affected those in the YES. Thus, as Watts noted (1996), the principles of non-directive guidance, careers education, and a more humanistic approach began to shape practitioners' delivery, though such principles still had to compete with the gate-keeping functions of careers and appointments boards, particularly during the Milkround period, when graduate recruiters visited universities to complete their first screen of potential candidates (Castro, 2007). The main structural change that shifted HE services from Milkround styled, appointments services, with individual careers interviews that may or may not have been non-directive, was a product of the recession of the early nineties, together with the expansion of HE student numbers (Watts, 1996). In short, careers services could not offer the same appointments' functions, simply because employers, and particularly those from engineering, construction and science were not recruiting in anywhere near the same numbers as previously.

In addition, the growth of globalisation, and the diversification of the student body, meant that services and recruiters could not as easily rely on the traditional networks and relationships to recruit. This in part led to a reorientation of services away from gate-keeping, Milkround-type to ones which reflected to some extent to the kind of organisational locations seen in FE. Watts (Ibid) summarised these in the following way: Student Services based (often in the polytechnics); in Academic Services (often in the more traditional universities); or Marketing (reflecting a quite radical shift that come to a fuller expression in the wake of the Browne Review, 2010). A further one was also extant: services that could stand alone (such as the Oxbridge or the University of London, federated services), but which still needed to report to a university committee when presenting their annual review.

As a result of the economic and social changes noted above, HE services experienced shifts in the nature and basis of their professionalism. If careers services were no longer there to get graduate jobs, or at least, not in the same way as previously, then what were they supposed to be for? Part of the answer lay in the changing requirements of graduates to develop the skills to manage their careers, or career management skills, which would enable them to secure jobs and grow their careers in leaner, meaner, globally-orientated companies (Hawkins, 1995). In truth, this was a re-packaging of the careers education, DOTS model (Watts and Law, 1996), though it may have appeared new to HE careers services which had tended to rely on appointments-styled provision, with (at best) patchy or ad-hoc curriculum interventions. AGCAS, too, responded by commissioning a report (Watts, 1997) to examine the possible strategic directions of HE careers services – one of which was to develop students' career management skills through curriculum interventions.

These developments posed something of a challenge to HE careers staff whose previous skills' set rested on developing employer contacts and interviewing skills, with some of the latter resting on professional qualifications (while a lot did not). Watts (2007) noted the increasing amounts of practitioner with the DipCG moving into HE services, bringing with them perspectives that reflected careers guidance and education training; while AGCAS itself established its own set of careers guidance qualifications for HE staff at the University of Reading, culminating in a formal Diploma in HE careers work, and extensive regional and national training provision (Ibid.).

The subsequent decade that led up to the Browne Review (2010) and HE's adoption of employability as a key strategic target, amplified these questions of functions, professionalism and identity. In common with her approach to statutory careers guidance services, Baroness Blackstone showed her rather narrow view of HE careers guidance by indicating that it was the 'Cinderella Service' of HE (DfEE, 2001: 1), and thus commissioned the Harris Review to make

recommendations for developing provision. This was an odd exercise, indicating its structural and power weaknesses, e.g. the report made recommendations but had no real power to influence their implementation; and assumptions of service models that were inaccurate.

However, it did expose HE careers services' Achilles heel: in that the report claimed that most were benignly neglected, with some institutional interest, even support and patronage, but with no real scrutiny or accountability of the kind seen in the performance indicators applied to the then Connexions Services. For example, HEIs did not appear to question seriously the impact that services may or may not have been making on graduate destinations. This was something of a double-edged sword for services, in that they could be left alone, more or less, to get on with their jobs, without the fear of punitive accountability; however, it also meant that they often lacked the organisational leverage needed to integrate career management skills into students' formal learning programmes.

Once again, the effect of state mediation (Johnson, 1972) was telling on careers guidance provision, this time in HEIs. The growth of graduate numbers, and advent of students' increasing contribution to their university fees under New Labour, led to questions about the link between paying for university and career outcomes. Elias and Purcell's research (2004), entitled 'Seven Years On', acquired national attention and policy significance, since it established that graduate career outcomes had not been adversely affected by the increase in graduates, and that having a degree attracted a positive salary differential as compared to those who only had A-levels. This debate was also accompanied by research commissioned by HEFCE into the extent of career management/education provision in HE (Yorke and Knight, 2006) and led to a definition of employability that was adopted by the sector. Again, this definition was not so different to DOTS (Watts and Law, 2006) – but it did define the skills, knowledge and (almost ontological) approach required by graduates in the context of massified HE and changed graduate jobs (Elias and Purcell, 2004). Of course, the Browne Review

(2010) helped in part to change the definition of employability from a state of being to a career outcome, so that graduate destinations and employability ratings made up the mix of performance indicators on which university league tables rest.

It could be argued, therefore, that HE careers services would have been best placed in their institutions to lead the development of services to foster employability skills and outcomes. This is to under-estimate services' structural weaknesses and varying expert power base (Larson, 1977). Some services have been able to take advantage of the centrality of employability to their host institutions' overall strategy; and attracted greater political clout with increased resources and profile (Bolman and Deal, 2003), e.g. University of Birmingham careers services have rebranded themselves as the Careers Network, with highly differentiated roles that reflect the importance of stakeholder management (Handy, 1993), such as employers and academic departments, as well as employability skills' development.

However, in this instance, the employability strategy is not owned by the Network: instead, the service is meant to justify its structural and political realignments and resources (Bolman and Deal, 2003) by hitting employability performance targets. In this way, HE services have finally succumbed to new accountabilities (Banks, 2004) that had bitten into 14 – 19 services in England decades earlier. The question of who owns the employability agenda also emphasises careers services' often hybrid role and status (Yellowley, Farmer and Smith, 2013). Careers guidance practitioners are not academics, and so could not fully drive the adoption of employability as part a learning and teaching strategy – this would rest with an institutional committee that would set such a plan. In addition, they are not quite simply administrative staff who manage processes that support the operational running of a university, since they are involved in enabling career and personal development.

This uncertain institutional status affects the role and power of the professional body for HE careers guidance services. AGCAS can not – and does not – necessarily compel its member services to absolutely insist on a level of professional qualifications for its staff. It can recommend it, but has to accept the realpolitik of services choosing to recruit staff from non-qualified applicants. Indeed, with the prominence of employability (as in, career destinations), then some services have reverted to a previous mode of recruitment as discussed earlier in this section, when practitioners' expertise was their knowledge of, and connections with, graduate recruiters and recruitment. Services may then require such recruits to undertake professional training, but again there doesn't appear to be a standard route to 'becoming qualified', since practitioners may elect to follow the QCG or AGCAS qualifications. Moreover, HEIs' concern is not with recruiting careers guidance qualified staff since it is not essential for the practice of the profession in universities, unlike librarianship or counselling. The concern is more with graduate employability performance targets.

A final point before the conclusion of this section concerned with HE is the status and operation of the professional body. Certainly it grew from a largely volunteer-based operation, nestled in small rooms offered by the University of Sheffield Careers Service, to what now constitutes a small enterprise, with employed staff, and a range of services and products (Ford et al., 2007). Recently, too, it has diversified its strategic partnerships, and now links with GTI as well as Graduate Prospects in the development and provision of careers guidance products (though it is worth noting that the relationship with the latter has been turbulent and affected by the tougher graduate recruitment market). However, it did not join the CDI – about which Watts (2014) was scathing – and this can only help to curry the impression that HE services continue to see themselves as somehow special or different from careers guidance provision elsewhere, thereby weakening any attempts by the CDI to talk about an overall careers guidance profession. Perhaps the pressures on HE services as a result of the growth of

employability targets have made them more organisationally contingent (Evetts, 2005). It is worth iterating that this view of HE services helped to motivate my research: that is, to what is careers guidance simply contingent on its organisational or sectoral context; or are there commonalities in identity and professionalism that transcend such boundaries?

2.5.3 Conclusions for services in FE and HE

In the same way as for careers services for young people in England, it is clear that services in FE and HE have been similarly affected by policies concerned with education, training and employment. The key difference, however, is that the host organisations also heavily influence the structure, shape, resources and profile of such services, so that different service models can be identified (e.g. Watts, 2006) and which continue to mutate, particularly in HE where the impact of the employability agenda is marked. And whilst it is also clear that FE and HE services have developed, both in terms of their expertise and professionalism, organisational and structural weaknesses still persist, where services have varying degrees of leverage and power to effect the changes they seek, e.g. in owning and leading the employability agenda. The extent to which careers guidance, and its practitioners, are mainly if not entirely contingent, and thus undermining any sense of common professional identity, is a question that my research has sought to address.

2.6 Adult and Community Settings

So far, this chapter has explored provision for young people in schools, as well as students in FE and HE. To complete the discussion of the development of careers guidance services, and their organisational and provider contexts, one final client area to cover is that for adults. The need for adult guidance is relatively recent: since structural employment up until the late 1970s meant that adults tended to remain in their jobs and employers, or could use services such as job centres, employment agencies and the like to find another job (Roberts,

1995). Indeed, identifiable careers guidance provision for adults emerged with the development of adult learning offered by FE colleges or adult education units, and could be offered either by the institution concerned or by the Careers Service in England (Hawthorne, 1996). The National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA) which existed from 1982 to 2013, before it merged with the CDI, was indicative of this emphasis on educational guidance for this client group. This policy focus – on adults seeking to develop their skills and careers – finds its current expression in NIACE, whose current strategy is concerned with developing adults’ learning and skills to boost employability and productivity, as well as social justice and well-being (NIACE, 2015).

The formal provision of adult guidance – as distinct from that offered by services to adults who ask and can be seen by helpful staff – is thus predicated on governments’ aim of lifting the education levels and skills of adults to enhance their employability. This aim was summarised as adult advancement (IUS, 2007) and reflected in part the same quasi-moral policy direction that helped to drive the set-up of the Connexions Service, where society’s citizens had to actively participate in, and contribute to, society’s development by working. The Next Step service in England was thus created, which offered telephone guidance services as well as drop-in, face-to-face services (or branded ‘f2f’) alongside e-mail and website services (BIS, 2012). This highly procedural, even scripted, service, with advisers following standardised wording when introducing services and making referrals, showed high levels of customer (sic) satisfaction (Watts and Dent, 2007) and impressive levels of service usage, with high numbers of referrals being made to training providers in order to develop clients’ literacy, numeracy and IT skills (BIS, 2012). Interestingly, some Connexions Services providers, e.g. Prospects, and Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull Partnerships (CSWP), also had bid for and secured Next Step contracts.

Of course, and as we have seen with the careers service for young people, organisational configurations rarely stay the same for long. A new government in 2010; a new Education Bill (2011); the withering of Connexions; and then the morphing of Next Step provision into the new National Careers Service (NCS) (2012) that, whilst retaining some of the features of the previous service, like the lifelong learning account, became a new brand, with a new livery, house style and a re-adoption of the word ‘careers’ (with ‘advancement’ as a supporting plank thrown on the policy skip with the rest of the previous government’s schemes).

What does this service for England indicate about careers guidance for adults, and for professionalism for generally? As noted earlier in this review, the Silver Review (DfE, 2010) recommended the need for impartial careers guidance delivered by practitioners qualified to a minimum level 6 qualification. The NCS does stress its impartiality; but the government still allows NCS staff to provide information and advice with QCF qualification levels at 3 or 4. In addition, performance indicators stipulated in new post 2014 contracts have become tighter, with funding being payable for sustainable employability outcomes, not just action plans. This tightening reflects the government’s insistence on ‘payment by results’ as identified in the Work Programme (DWP, 2011), where providers of training and employment support for longer-term unemployed receive funding on a graded scale. In some respects, however, the policy direction provided by governments since 2010 shares a similar ideological outlook on adult skills and employment, and the services intended to support this aim: making work work, especially for the long-term unemployed.

2.7 Overall conclusions concerning the functions, structure and power of the careers guidance profession and its practitioners

The aim of this chapter was to critically discuss the literature which has been concerned with the definition and development of careers guidance provision in England. This literature draws on functionalist, structural and power perspectives, as well as those that consider the traits of professions. It is clear that societal expectations of careers guidance's function have been two-fold: to support economic prosperity by helping people to choose the most suitable jobs; and to tackle issues of social exclusion that prevent full participation in society. The organisational and provider contexts have thus arisen out of these expectations. As the chapter has shown, much of the literature has explored the development of provision in schools, on which the development of professional bodies and qualifications has rested. To extend the analysis of careers guidance and its provider contexts, developments in FE, HE and adult guidance settings have also been critically explored.

The literature considered in this chapter has a number of relevant perspectives for subsequent chapters. Identifying the apparent traits of careers guidance has been useful in defining its purpose and activities, and links to aspects of the data analysis and critical discussion in chapters five and six. The in-depth discussion of the development and features of provision in schools, FE, HEIs and adult guidance settings clarifies the contexts with which practitioners engage in their everyday practices. These details will also make the notion of structure more concrete and defined; this is also critical for the chapters five and six.

More importantly, this chapter has set out the issues raised by the existing literature concerning careers guidance and its practitioners, as well as its limitations. Part of the problematic is that the practitioners appear to operate in disconnected provider contexts that have developed separately from each other. Thus, services in schools, colleges, universities

and adult provision have developed along parallel tracks. As a result, practitioners may appear to belong to (if that is the right verb) a profession with a number of political and structural weaknesses. One persisting challenge has been the lack of standard, legally required qualification framework and entry route to the profession. Even if practitioners in schools were expected to have the DipCG, there was no legal requirement for this in England. An additional issue is the lack of a fully united and coherent professional body that can lobby government, and enforce codes of professional conduct. As a result, careers guidance practitioners and their roles have been dramatically altered, particularly in relation to schools.

The existing literature thus displays a number of limitations. Firstly, it often discusses careers guidance in organisational and structural terms, whilst at the same time much of the research into practitioners' values and perceptions has focused on those who work in schools. Secondly, it has often overlooked the role of practitioners in the development of provision, and the ways in which they exercise their agency in service contexts. Thirdly, the discourses that do consider practitioners, their role and identity reflect deterministic and pessimistic perspectives. They assume that practitioners are done onto, with little apparent power over their work or the meanings they create; or, that in order to cope with such irresistible, sovereign forces, they need to retreat to kind of existential resilience. These discourses also reflect two further limitations: a tendency to assume an ontology in general definition of professional identity; and a kind of nostalgia for a golden period of careers guidance which, as the chapter shows, is hard to identify. As a result, all of the above fails to properly research what practitioners in a wide variety settings actually do, and how they express their professional identity by engaging with organisational structures and fellow practitioners. In short, theorists and commentators seem rather defeated, and inclined to reflect the oppositional managerialist/practitioner paradigm that also casts practitioners as disempowered victims of marketised, neo-liberal public services.

The perspectives missing so far are thus those that can shed more illuminating light on the nature and role of practitioners' agency; and the ways in which they interact with, influence, and even shape, the structures in which they operate to create significant meaning and identity to their work. One phrase that I keep returning to is the notion that individuals are not simply unthinking victims of neo-liberalism and managerialism, and act as cultural dopes (Giddens, 1984).

The next chapter will therefore critically analyse the relevance of theories and concepts concerning structuration for the aims of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGENCY AND STRUCTURE; AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Introduction

The main theoretical perspectives featured in the previous chapter were concerned with function, structure and the status of careers guidance. These served the purpose of helping to define the role of careers guidance in relation to societal expectations; the development of the sector, partly in response to such expectations, and as part of educational settings, such as schools; and questions of the profession's leverage and esteem. The latter was linked to recent adverse and deterministic discourses concerned with the apparently fragmented and diminished state of the profession, and its demoralised, de-professionalised and powerless practitioners. These discourses also reflect the oppositional managerial and practitioner paradigm that features in the work of writers such as Banks (2004) and Evetts (2005).

The theoretical perspectives critically appraised in this chapter aim to achieve two things. Firstly, they highlight the limitations of the debates summarised in the previous chapter, particularly in the way in which they overlook the role of agency in everyday practices (Giddens, 1984). Such debates also assume more general definitions of professionalism and professional identity that reflect an ontology in general, rather than a more precise ontology in situ (Stones, 2005). In other words, the discourses examined in the previous section of the review overlook the actual ways in which people work within, and interact with, the structures and organisations of which they are a part. Secondly, and in case of structuration theory in particular, they offer the main lens through which my exploration of the extent and nature of professional identity is both shaped and evaluated. The theories and concepts that are presented in this section are concerned with the relationship between agency

and structure, most particularly Giddens (1984, 1991), Bourdieu (1989), Mouzelis (1991) and Stones (2005) – the latter being particularly key to the development of my thesis.

3.2 The relationship between agency and structure

3.2.1 The problem of agency and structure

Parker (2000) neatly summarises the problem of how to conceive of the existence and day-to-day living of individuals within their society. Subjectivism, or Humanism, (Snare, 1992) foregrounds the agency of individuals or, to express this another way, that people act freely with little or no constraint by society. Interestingly, much of careers choice theory (e.g., Super, 1957, Super and Bohn, 1971, and Holland, 1997) is concerned with the existing and potential skills and capabilities of individuals, and the ways in which they can be matched to jobs, and/or how people enact their preferences and wishes. These more subjectivist theories tend to assume that individuals can implement their choices and preferences freely. By contrast, objectivism argues the opposite: that societal structures, such as education, government, and employers, constrain or even dictate individual actions, so that there is no agency. Again, and in relation to careers guidance, writers such as Roberts (1977, 2001) and Blustein and Ellis (2000), point to the overwhelming influence of structural forces on career and life outcomes.

As Parker (2000) notes, both of these philosophies often ignore, in simple terms, how people actually act and think in their day-to-day lives. For instance, his critique of Marxism is quite acute, in that it fails to ‘solve the problem of how to incorporate the human material into the theory of history’ (Ibid: 28). The conceptual challenge, however, is to define and explore the ways in which people interact with the structures and organisations of which they are a part and yet also operate and influence. The challenge of defining the relationship between agency and structure is one that partly informed the genesis of this thesis. Are

careers guidance practitioners simply subjected to powerful, structural forces, like governmental legislation; or are there more complex ways in which they operate, affect the organisations in which they work, and derive a professional identity that both symbolises their agency and the complex relationship between them and their professional context?

3.2.2 The idea of duality of structure

One way in which social theorists have conceived of this relationship is one of duality of structure; and Bourdieu (1989) and Giddens particularly (1984; 1991) have been most associated with this idea. Essentially, agency and structure exist in a duality so that they share the same identity (Parker, 2000). For example, a careers service in a university may occupy an observable, physical space; but what makes it recognisable as a service is the way in which careers practitioners and their clients operate and interact. These processes and interactions define what we mean by a careers service in that setting. If no-one occupied the space, and did not interact in particular ways, then there would be no service that we would recognise as such; and the offices would be used for something else.

A further, perhaps more important, point is that the idea of what a careers service is, and how it should operate, is carried internally by the practitioners concerned. This knowledge is predicated on the past experiences of practitioners and clients, e.g., the experience of gaining professional qualifications; and working in different settings. Such experience and knowledge, which in part forms the identity of the practitioners, also shapes the daily interactions with clients, and more widely within the organisation. As a result, the entity that is the careers guidance service is continually created. In this way, the agents, and their structures are identified with each other.

The two main proponents of this duality emphasise different aspect of the expression of the relationship between agency and structure.

3.2.3 Bourdieu and Habitus

Bourdieu (1989) is most associated with the concept of habitus. He defines this as the embodied dispositions which people acquire from the settings in which they live and operate. These dispositions are shared with others from the same settings, e.g., their social class, and are indicated by ingrained habits, skills and knowledge – in short, cultural capital. He considers the role of language to be a key part of this shaping and reinforcing; thus, the way people speak carries all sorts of indicators of person's status and the cultural capital they carry. For Bourdieu, the concept of the field is important, too, since this is where people and their social positions are located. One example of a field – linking back to the consideration of the professions in chapter two – would be the Inns of Court in London, where barristers, newly-qualified or more experienced, operate within a particular form of habitus, where their cultural capital is both exercised and developed. To the rest of society, such Inns are powerful indicators of embodied dispositions and their status.

The genesis of his idea is in rejecting the separation between, and the orthodoxies of, subjectivism and objectivism. He rejects Marxism, for example, for its overly deterministic view of the effects of structures, e.g., class on people. Instead, he claims that far from simply looking at the world, or being subjected to it, e.g., taking the bus, driving a car, and going to work routinely and without much thought, individuals act, interact and so produce it. In this way, people are both situated – existing as part of structures, such as employing organisations – but also actively engaged in exercising our skills, influence and everyday agency. In extrapolating these ideas onto careers guidance, we may see practitioners actively debating and determining the ways in which they organise interview services in response to, say, a HEI's employability policies, the needs of clients, and the advisers' belief in what interviews should achieve.

A further key concept is the way in which habitus (Ibid.) is also concerned with embodiment, and the role of language in this sense of being. Again, in relation to careers guidance, practitioners in a HEI careers service may speak and act in particular ways that both reflect and define the service context. This is an interpolation of my experience, but I have observed the ways in which the manner of speech, and dress, help to embody a service. For example, practitioners in a HEI careers service in a Russell Group University will talk of service aims and concerns, such as working extensively with graduate recruiters, in ways that may contrast with practitioners who work in, for instance, less traditional HEIs. The former set of individuals may dress differently, too.

This embodied self (Ibid.) – the way of acting that reflects and promotes the nature of the context concerned - may signify a number of points consistent with the notion of habitus. Firstly, a style of clothes may need to reflect the ways in graduate recruiters appear so as to promote rapport and confidence between the practitioners and recruiters. Secondly, the ways in which their service should act, e.g., in helping recruiters to find suitable graduates, may also be predicated on the previous experience of careers advisers, who may well have worked in graduate recruitment previously. This point in particular was discussed in the previous chapter, when the development of services in HEI contexts was considered.

Extending this example further may also illustrate the potential inequalities inherent in habitus. Practitioners in an apparently prestigious HEI setting are recruited because of their suitability – but the latter may signal that such suitability is based on the applicants' savoir-faire, and knowing what to do in the given situation. In other words, their social background, education, and employment - their cultural capital - produce habits of speech and acting that dispose them to become part of the service. As Parker (2000) notes in his exploration of Bourdieu's ideas, the likely success of an agent's ability to flourish in a particular context is constrained by habitus. More powerful and dominant groups in society

maintain their position by such habits of speech, and being that signify that an individual has the desired social and cultural capital to fit in.

In this way, aspects of Bourdieu's theory may stray towards objectivism, e.g., the role of class over career outcomes, and also functionalism, e.g., the function of a particular context, or habitus, in preserving the status quo of class and privilege. However, in his view, the reproduction of dominant structures reflects the idea that influence is spread unequally through various fields of competition (Bourdieu, 1989) – with such fields, linked to my example above, being employers and professional bodies. If this is a valid view, then the implication seems to be that agents may carry experience and structures, and shape them in ways that still promote inequalities.

The significance of Bourdieu's ideas (as examined more fully in the discussion chapter) to my thesis covers a number of aspects. That individuals are both situated and engaged is a key point, in that the suggestion is people do not unthinkingly slot into jobs, or other structures, that deny their agency. In addition, the notion that language and embodiment help to create habitus may also link to the idea of a Balkanised careers guidance profession (Bimrose et al., 2013) – that is, situated practitioners help to create distinctive services that are shaped by the very fact that they have to respond to varying organisational demands. Practitioners in schools may face different priorities to those who work in FE and HE, and so, necessarily, they all must be different from one another. Bourdieu's ideas may act as conceptual challenges to the possibility of a shared professional identity, whatever the situated nature of practitioners.

That said, Parker (2000) and Stones (2005) are rightly critical of the concept of habitus, vastly influential as it has been. In their view, Bourdieu proposes ideas of acting and being in rather generalised contexts, and at a more abstract, phenomenological level – in

other words, the ideas seem to float over, even ignore, the actual ways in which people live and work within contexts of complexity. The limitations of this speculative approach also informed the aims of my thesis: in that I aimed to explore the relationships between practitioners and their context, and the meaning that this interaction produces, using a rigorous research method.

Having considered Bourdieu's ideas, we now turn to assess Giddens's propositions, and the value of them, for the questions of professional identity.

3.2.4 Giddens' Structuration; and knowledgeable social actors

If Bourdieu was concerned with recurring behaviour and language patterns that help to create habitus, then Giddens (1984) wanted to know why these patterns persist historically. For him, the answer could not lie in subjectivism, or simply the agency of individuals, since social systems continue over time – decades or even over centuries. Similarly, the role of structures in society could not answer his question, either, since in his view people are not cultural dopes, and act in ways that show their social competence (Ibid.). His proposition is that social systems, e.g., education, or day to day work in organisations, are structured by the interactions between people in those settings.

Giddens suggested a number of arguments to support his concept. He proposed that structures are not just the patterning of given rules and systems within a society. In his view, they do not become meaningful until they have been mobilised, and reproduced, by the people who exist within them. Such people are able to act in this way because they have 'practical consciousness' (1984: 58) and knowledgeability, often existing as memory traces, which allows them to draw on the resources offered by such structures. In his view, structure, in being the means by which people act, also becomes the outcome of such action; ontologically, it exists in the moments when agents use and reproduce it through their social

practices. An example to illustrate these propositions is the structure of a school. It has a physical arrangement, with rooms indicating to which classes the children are allocated; but the parts of the structure, such as the curriculum, exist only when teachers and students engage in learning activities that are shaped by government requirements, and the knowledgeability that the social actors bring to the exchange. The structure of the school is thus reproduced by daily action and engagement.

As with Bourdieu (1989), the ways in which people exercise their agency rest on the use of language, especially since social interactions that help to create processes would not exist without it. These characteristics define the idea of knowledgeable social actors who can exercise agency in ways that influence, even change and transcend structures are particularly relevant to the generation of my thesis. They stand in direct challenge to the discourses critically discussed in chapter two which imply that careers guidance practitioners are subjected to governmental and organisational policies. For Parker (2000), who critically appraised Giddens' ideas, this knowledgeability of people who still act within structures is the basis of the concept of duality of agency and structure. Agency cannot operate outside society and its structures, and so to be exercised it needs to use them. However, structures are also in large part created by people interacting and creating processes, even cultures, and also subject to change. The relationship between the two is therefore close and mutually symbiotic.

A brief example here may illustrate the applicability of this duality to the planning and delivery of careers guidance. Since the advent of top fees and full fees (Brown, 2010) in HE, employability has become a key strategic concern for HEIs who are keen to show the career and economic benefits of a degree. However, the prevalence and meaning of employability in HEIs is predicated on a close relationship between practitioners' values agency, and the policy and organisational structures in which they operate. Practitioners can

define employability as a state of being: that individuals possess skills, qualifications and dispositions that make them more employable, and more successful and satisfied in their work (Yorke and Knight, 2006). This definition was generated from a research project, involving HEI careers services and practitioners, before employability became such a strategic concern. By contrast, HEI's corporate definition is more concerned with career outcomes, otherwise labelled as positive destinations, e.g., the percentage of graduates achieving employment in a certain class of roles and above a particular salary level (Artess et al., 2016). However, and as discussed in chapter two, the ways in which careers guidance practitioners interact with academic colleagues, and managers within the HEIs, produce employability programmes that reflect both the practitioners' values and the need to be accountable to positive destination targets.

3.2.5 Limitations: assumptions and ontology in general

At first, Bourdieu's and Giddens' concepts appear to offer relevant and useful prisms through which my thesis can be viewed. However, these prisms, and perspectives have been critically challenged for the assumptions that they make about the nature of agency, and the varying degrees to which structures can be more or less powerful. Parker (2000) argues that Giddens has been rather too optimistic about individuals' abilities, capacities and inclination to be able to exercise their agency, and act otherwise. Further, he claims that Giddens also overlooks 'the continuing power of structures to direct' (Ibid: 65); indeed, the role of class and socio-cultural status in determining career and life outcomes has been well-documented (e.g., Roberts, 2001; DWP, 2014).

More fundamentally, Archer (1995) attacks the whole notion of duality. She argues that, while agency and structure are related, they are not the same, and need to be seen separately to judge the nature of the relationship between them. She used the development of

different education systems to illustrate her concept. These systems have emerged, often over centuries, as a result of the historical traditions and realities of different social systems. Individuals do not simply create a particular school system by their interactions, as much of it is pre-existing, and predicated on complex traditions and legislation. Structures thus acquire force in ways that are not dependent on social actors. More tellingly, she also challenges Giddens's view of agents acting otherwise; if this were the case, then why do people keep replicating structures and systems; and why are some systems susceptible to change by people, while others are not? For her, the question posed by examining the nature of the relationship between agency and structure should concern the tension between freedom and constraints.

This tension is partly defined and explored in her morphogenetic approach (Ibid.) which proposes that the relationship between agency and structure exists in a dualism, not a duality. Instead of carrying structures as part of themselves (Giddens, 1984), Archer is much less sanguine about individuals' agency, and asserts that people are located involuntarily into their respective positions in a social system (Archer, 1995). An example here is that people are born into complex societal systems, expressed and represented by family structures, education, language, employment and so on – they do not choose their location. However, Archer (Ibid.) also rejects Objectivism; her concept is that people act as both individuals and as part of collectives, anchored within but not enslaved to structures, and make continual actions and decisions. These may be necessary compromises – such as the need to engage with opportunity structures when applying for jobs – as well as more opportunistic and self-actualising actions (Maslow, 1987), such as achieving promotion, or creating alternative roles, such as volunteering, or more creative, personal pursuits. Interestingly, the idea of individuals occupying multiple roles as part of a wider career (one that is not just linked to having a job) is one that features in Super's (1963) developmental career choice theory. In

essence, people are not freely-floating because they are anchored in stratified social structures, especially class; but they can exercise agency and influence (Archer, 1995).

Archer's dualism poses quite a significant challenge to the usefulness of structuration to my thesis, and particularly to the idea that individuals influence and create processes and structures of which they are also a part. However, Mouzelis's (1991) work may be seen in part to answer the challenge posed by Archer's work by extending Giddens's and Bourdieu's propositions to look again at the agency and structure relationship. He suggests that agency and structure are interrelated, especially when considering people in their work settings. His concern with the ways in which people act and interact within organisational structures is relevant to my thesis, since my research explores the ways in which practitioners perceive their sense of professionalism and identity within organisations, e.g., schools and colleges. Indeed, his exploration of macro and micro structures offers a useful link to, and platform for, Stone's (2005) development of strong structuration.

One proposition of his offers an illuminating (and pertinent) perspective of the agency that people have in organisations and their roles. For example, he states that individuals occupy jobs within a stratified hierarchy, and often within departments whose role has been differentiated within a complex organisation (Tjosvold and Wisse, 2009). An illustration of this point is that of a university, where there are a range of academic faculties and departments, with roles such as lecturer, senior lecturer, principal lecturer, and head of school; but also departments fulfilling central functions, such as registry, finance, human resources, IT, library and so on. Again, these departments also have roles that exist in a hierarchy. Mouzelis argues that to a large extent these organisational features enable and/or constrain action, e.g., a clerical assistant in a registry function is likely to have much less potential for influence than a principal registry officer.

These roles, therefore, are not just defined by job descriptions; they also represent position practices (Bhaskar, 1979, Mouzelis, 1991) that signify the accumulated and current expectations of a role. In occupying such a position (like a job), the social actor also needs to understand the practices that the position requires at a given time. This point is extended by Shilling (1997) in relation to teachers: that the ways in which they teach, with all the required processes, curriculum content, and styles, reflect the governmental requirements and societal expectations of that period of time. Thus, the role of a teacher may be defined generically, as well as a position-practice expectation that reflects contemporary policies. This argument may be consistent with Archer's dualism: that whilst people can exercise agency, they are still anchored in structures that produce outcomes. However, Mouzelis (1991) then develops a sophisticated and insightful point: that the relationship between actors and structures is not necessarily as rigid as position practices may imply; and the outcomes may not always be predictable. Again, an interpolation of my experience here may illustrate this point. As a very senior manager, the habitus (Bourdieu, 1989) I experienced, and tried to operate within, was much more constraining and rigid in its requirement to be seen to embody the expected behaviours, demeanour, language and savoir-faire of such a manager. Further, the ability to effect outcomes was, in my view, strictly limited by a highly politicised frame (Bolman and Deal, 2003) in which individual's profile and alliances were key. I found this in contrast to my roles as a careers adviser, and more latterly, a senior lecturer, where the autonomy and scope to have a direct effect on the shaping and delivery of the services and learning to students was considerable. Of course, for someone else, the outcome and experience of these scenarios may have been different. For Mouzelis (1991), the relationship between structure and agency, therefore, is interdependent, and not separated as in Archer's view; and the ways in which it plays out relies on (using my example here) the historical nature of an organisation's processes, and the ways in which individuals interact with and use them.

3.2.6 Strong structuration: what agents actually do within defined and concrete contexts

A further key aspect of Mouzelis's (1991) ideas is his interest in not just macro structures but also those at a micro level. Relating this idea to careers guidance, we might make general statements about, for example, the relative lack of functional and organisational leverage of careers advisers in the wake of the Education Act (2011). These, however, make general assumptions about particular contexts that may not apply to, or are in fact contradicted by, the precise ways in which people exercise their daily influence over their jobs. Also, as chapter two showed in detail, provider contexts can differ quite widely, particularly as a result of governmental and organisational policies concerning employment, education and training.

This in large part is the focus of Stones' (2005) strong structuration. He is critical of Giddens' (1984) and Bourdieu's (1989) assumptions of an ontology in general, where the propensity of people to act, think and be in relation to their ideas, is proposed but not supported empirically. However, rather than rejecting structuration as a whole because of these perceived weakness, as Archer (1995) does, he seeks to reformulate the ways in which ontology and structures are more closely defined and related. An additional key element is the way in which strong structuration should have a robust empirical basis: one which draws on research that has explored (often qualitatively) the ways in which agents operate and make meaning within everyday contexts that also reflect wider societal structures. The latter point has particular relevance to my thesis which, as the aim shows, is concerned with the precise nature of practitioners' professionalism and identity in relation to, but not dictated by, the organisational setting within which they work.

The basis of his formulation, therefore, is to examine 'ontology in empirical analysis' (Stones, 2005: 77), the levels of which go beyond Giddens's (1984) and Bourdieu's (1989)

ontology in general. The second level after the latter is the meso-level (Stones, 2005), that is, one which shows some variety or fills out the details missing in the more general level. The next is the ontic level, which identifies the specific details of living, if I can put it that way, usually informed by empirical analysis. This concept of ontological levels is particularly revealing and relevant to the approach I have taken to my research. For example, I would argue that at the first level, ontology in general, often informs the kinds of discourses considered in the previous chapter, e.g., the use of a more general definition of professional identity, and the apparently powerless nature of careers guidance and its practitioners to resist policy and managerialism. The second, meso level, may apply to the discussion concerning the different settings that practitioners operate in, e.g., within schools, colleges, HEIs, and adult guidance settings – in other words, there is some variability in the idea and practicalities of being a careers guidance practitioner. As Stones notes, it is important to clarify this meso level, so that the ways in which people act and interact within such contexts can be more accurately explored and understood. The ontic level is where my research is particularly focussed: what do careers guidance practitioners actually do; where; how; why did they enter the profession; what satisfactions do they derive; and what is their actual sense of identity and professionalism. Further, this level is also concerned with exploring the motivation, knowledgeability and critical self-awareness of individuals, particularly in the way in which they see the intended consequences of their actions (Ibid.: 78).

These ontological considerations form the basis of Stones's Quadripartite Nature of Structuration (2005: 84ff). The four elements are external structures; internal structures; active agency; and outcomes. Again, this model offers further, sophisticated theoretical concepts that will enable critical discussion of my data and emerging model of professional identity in chapters five and six. It will be useful here to define these elements, since the terms do not necessarily fit with more common everyday descriptions. For example, external

structures are not limited to more general societal systems, e.g., education; but are concerned more with the ‘action horizon of in-situ agents.’ (Ibid.: 85). To illustrate this briefly using an example drawn from careers guidance, then such a horizon may be the implications of revised statutory guidance issued to schools in England (DfE,2015). Whilst the guidance may have issued from a governmental structure, the perceived implications for a particular school-based careers guidance practitioner are more real and pressing.

The definition of internal structures needs a little picking apart, and again offers granular concepts that have aided the refinement of my thesis. Stones (2005) identifies two elements of such structures. The first is the general dispositional, which he links to Bourdieu’s (1989) ideas of habitus in terms of the taken for granted ways in which people operate and use language. The second reflects Stones’ (2005: 89) concern with more particular analysis, that of the ‘conjunctionally specific and the positional’. These sub-elements are also worth analysing in more detail. The idea of the positional can be linked to the ways in which job roles can be more generally defined, e.g., macro careers information websites will have more general occupational profiles that can apply generally to most contexts such as, in this case, careers guidance practitioner. These more general profiles can still reflect the press of external structures noted above, e.g., the information in the profile may have been modified as a result of recent legislative changes. By contrast, the conjunctionally specific aspect of internal structures considers the particular aspects of the roles in their contexts, e.g., what it might mean to work as a careers practitioner in an academy in Birmingham, as compared to one in a London borough. The similarities and differences that might occur would illustrate Stones’ (2005: 94) point that, when exploring the ideas of agency, agents should be considered ‘as being in the midst of, as already being caught up in, the flow of position-practices and their relations’ – or, as he expresses it, ‘agents in focus.’ To relate this point again to careers guidance, the questions might be as

follows. What are the position practices of careers practitioners in the two schools mentioned above? How are they shaped by, and relate to, the external and internal structures of government policy; the ways in which the schools have chosen to respond to the Education Act (2011) and statutory guidance (DfE, 2013, 2015); and the particular socio-economic and cultural context in which the schools operate?

Stones (2005) extends his theory of strong structuration by considering the idea of active agency. Again, the latter is relevant to the generation of my thesis, particularly in the way it emphasises the active knowledgeability and sense making of individuals. He proposes five aspects of agency (2005: 101), which are also illuminating to consider, since in my view they capture the multiple levels at which practitioners operate, and the ways they are constantly assessing their environments to adjust their practice. The first level is shifting horizons for action (an interesting link to Hodgkinson and colleagues' idea of Careership, 1996) – a necessary approach in the light of rapidly changing policies that have affected careers guidance, as considered in chapter two. The next considers the creativity and ability of practitioners to improvise; again, also required if the horizons for action shift continually and in response to the uniqueness of each client. The third level links to concepts of reflection on action and reflection in action (Gibbs, 1988, 1995), where practitioners can develop a critical distance and reflective stance, so that their self-awareness, understanding of their organisation and relevant policies, allows them to act otherwise (Giddens, 1984). The fourth level, conscious and unconscious motivations, again shows the various levels at which people operate. In relation to careers guidance, a practitioner may be consciously following position practice requirements, such as action planning, while unconsciously following their commitment to client-centred practice as espoused by the CDI (2014). The final level is concerned with the way in which an individual finally makes sense of the different issues and considerations, and identified priorities for action and purpose. Again, Stones stresses the

active knowledgeable ability of agents in making sense of their contexts, roles, motivations and desired outcomes of action – a key perspective for researching the ways in which careers guidance practitioners conceive of, construct and express their professional identity.

3.2.7 Strong structuration and research

A final and critical feature of strong structuration that distinguishes it from other formulations is its relationship with epistemology and research. In Stones' view, the latter helps shift Giddens' and Bourdieu's abstract ideas of ontology in general to a position where the actual relations between agency and structure are explored and defined. Indeed, the key questions that should guide such exploration also speak to the nub of my research (Stones, 2005: 117). They are: how do people perceive the world? What are the 'internal aspects' of this view? How embedded are these perceptions and internalised views of the world? How did they arrive at such views? And, if I may add my own question: how do these perceptions, views and sense of the world connect to demonstrate a common identity despite, but also in response to, the external and internal structures of policy, role, organisation and motivation?

What is also very compelling about the power of research in helping to uncover the fascinating relationships between agency and structure is that it can, in Stones' view, also identify commonalities between agents. As he expresses it, research can explore 'the intersection of agents and external structures in position-practice relations' (2005: 118). In my view, the invitation contained in this last point is clear: that the ways the careers guidance practitioners act and interact to produce both individually important and collectively significant professional identities, with shared features, need to be researched.

3.2.8 The professional identity of practitioners in education, health and social care: other possible discourses?

There are examples in the literature of the ways in which professional identity may be researched and analysed more precisely. They also offer alternatives to the perspectives discussed in chapter two. Mackey (2007) when considering osteopaths and their career development, sees professional identity as a collective entity and a project: that is, practitioners could not develop a sense of professional self without interactions with colleagues and supervisors; but at the same time, such an identity is also fluid and develops over time in response to the role challenges posed by clients and organisations. She also makes a point that resonates strongly with my research findings, and with my view of the limitations of a purely sociological view of professions: that the latter (e.g. Johnson, 1972) focus only on the repressive and sovereign nature of control on professions and professionals, and ignores the potential of the agent – the practitioner – in developing a strong sense of internal locus. As she expresses it: ‘professional identity lies in the constant interplay strategies of normalising professional power and resistance’ (2007: 98).

The importance of the interactions between self and others to the development of professional identity is also expressed by Sutherland and colleagues (2009) when examining teachers’ professional identity. Their research with early career teachers shows how emerging identities are developed and deepened by the sharing of individual narratives with other colleagues in a network. These stories explored the ways in which the teachers felt about applying theory to practice; or dealing with challenging learners; or how to manage organisational demands in relation to ethical standards. Sharing the narratives, receiving feedback and confirmation, hearing others’ stories, helped to develop the sense of identity as

well as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Again, the professional identity is developed as an aspect of social identity (Jenkins, 2004.) Cohen (2009) also expresses a similar view of the importance of collective and reflective talk to the development of teachers' professional identity: that in sharing reflective narratives with other colleagues, teachers then make 'identity bids' (Ibid.: 475) where their statements indicate their position as a professional in relation to key aspects of the profession, e.g. ethics, values, preferred theoretical stances and so on. The reaction of others to these 'bids', e.g. through questions and supportive, affirmative statements, helps to confirm their validity and to explore and deepen them further.

Continuing with the teaching profession, Beijaard and colleagues (2003) provide a detailed review of studies that have attempted to define teachers' professional identity. Whilst the article does not claim a comprehensive definition, it does highlight one common theme in the studies: that 'professional identity is an ongoing process of integration of the 'personal' and 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher.' (Ibid.: 113) The theme of the self in relation to, and interacting with, others in a complex organisational and policy environment, also emerges, such that professional identity is valued but remains an ongoing personal project. This sense of the situated nature of identity was previously considered by Bruner (1990) who claimed that a person's sense of their occupation and its identity is rooted in her or his social, political, and cultural context. The idea, too, of the on-going personal project of professional identity is amplified by Sutherland and colleagues (2009), where practitioners tell stories about their core identity that, paradoxically, is still in a state of becoming.

A further relevant dimension concerning teachers' professional identity is practitioners' reaction to organisational change. Although the settings explored by Altopiedi and Lavie (2006) were primary schools in Spain, they also identify similar themes to those

discussed in this section: the internal and external dialectic between the self and others; the dynamic nature of professional identity; and the ways in which knowledgeable actors engage with organisations. The dimension here concerns change: the ways in which the schools presented organisational change (either positively or negatively); and the teachers' subsequent reactions, both individually and collectively. For example, if change was imposed, and presented as a response to failings, then the practitioners would seek to resist it; whereas if the school involved them in the process, sought their feedback, and recognised their professionalism, then there was a productive synergy between 'professional and organisational identities' (Ibid.: 3). Interestingly, the resistance to change arose where it appeared to traduce professional values and ethics, e.g. a belief in human potential and dignity, and the view of education as involving collaboration and respect. Where proposals were presented and conducted in ways that were in sympathy with such values, then the teachers were keen to support and enable them. As Banks (2004) points out, the values of managerialism and practitioners are often cast in opposition, as if the latter are part of the problem and are programmed by professional training to always resist organisational developments.

What has emerged so far in the consideration of teachers' and osteopaths' professional identities is that they are reliant on co-construction, and are dynamic rather than a static state of being achieved after a period of apprenticeship. This theme is also echoed in some of the literature concerning counsellors' professional identity. Fitzpatrick and colleagues (2010) describe how new counsellors continue to develop their theoretical stance, e.g. psychodynamic, or cognitive-behavioural, during a process of 'tentative identifications' (Ibid.: 95) that is heavily influenced by their practice supervisor as part of their early professional training. (It is worth iterating the point here that counsellors' professional training has strict and enforceable requirements as set by the BACP, indicating the relatively

stronger professional esteem of counselling in relation to career guidance.) Further, Magnusson (2000) maps a professional genogram, showing the diversity of influences over the ongoing development of counsellors' professional identity, with role of professional mentors and colleagues being critical in the process of becoming a practitioner. As for teachers and osteopaths, a strong sense of the importance of professional identity to counsellors emerges: that, through on-going supervision, they are constantly reviewing the ethical and knowledge basis of their practice.

3.3 Epistemological perspective

Having identified strong structuration (Stones, 2005) as the key perspective to guide and shape my analysis, a further crucial theoretical element is to identify, and justify, my epistemological perspective. Two points are relevant here. Firstly, my research aims are concerned with the lived experience, and the meanings that individuals generate. Secondly, strong structuration is focussed on exploring and defining the precise relationships between agency and structure. As a result, then, my epistemology must be based broadly on constructionism (Blaikie, 2010): that reality is made meaningful by consciousness, and the meaning that people construct, express and share (Sarantakos, 2005). The challenge, however, is to define my epistemology more precisely rather than in broad terms.

3.3.1 Broad aims of research more generally

As Epstein (2010) notes, research is concerned with epistemic possibilities of phenomena that prompt basic questions, such as what, who, how, and why. These possibilities may be categorised into two fundamental areas of knowledge. Positivism, or realism, assumes that the world exists beyond human experience of it; and so knowledge of phenomena is uncovered, using the senses and (as in the case of scientific research) sophisticated instruments for captured observable behaviour and properties. This is in

contrast to interpretivism, or idealism, which proposes that phenomena is interpreted and made meaningful by human consciousness, and particularly by language (Blaikie, 2010). For social sciences, these two epistemologies are translated into humanism and objectivism. The former is concerned with the primacy of humans' subjectivism in creating meaning, and shaping what we know as real; while the latter proposes that societal structures exist beyond our subjective experience of them, and shape and influence human lives (Benton and Craib, 2001).

3.3.2 The research problem; and more refined categories

Given that my research aim is concerned with the ways in which people construct, express and share meanings (in this case, in relation to professional identity), then it should follow that the most compatible epistemology should be interpretivist and idealist. However, the theoretical perspective that will help to guide my analysis, strong structuration, is concerned with the relationships between subjectivist agency and objectivist structure. In this way, the perspective may seem to hover between the two philosophies. Further, and as Stones (2005) and Giddens (1984) propose, the relationship between agency and structure is one of duality: that agents in part carry structures with them, based on previous experience, and are skilful in recreating and influencing them. However, they also argue that structures can also constrain choice and action – rather unlike the idealism of proposed types of action or individuals.

To help conceptualise this apparent blurring of idealist and realist epistemologies, Blaikie (2010) identifies a number of qualified categories. One is that of the subtle realist, a position that accepts that apparently claims for objective phenomena and knowledge are still subject to human conventions and constructions. This may link to Archer's (1995) morphogenetic theory, where structures exist because they have origins in the past, and have

tangible features that individuals still interact with. In addition, Bhaskar (1979) proposed that social structures may be seen to exist separately from individuals' activities and their perceptions, or conceptions, of such structures, e.g. social class, and gender, can be both experienced and quantified. A further category is constrained idealist: where the idea that reality is interpreted social action (Sarantakos, 2005) is qualified by the fact that such sense-making is mitigated, shaped and influenced by context. In other words, people generate meaning, and develop language in ways that are not idiosyncratic – otherwise, they would be meaningless without the use of common references points, behaviours and shared societal patterns.

3.3.3 Constrained idealism and constructionism

From this, my epistemological position is that of a constrained idealist, a position acutely expressed by Blaikie (2010: 89 – 90): that this perspective aims to construct 'theories that are derived from social actors' language, meanings and accounts in the context of everyday activities.' In conceiving of, and researching, the latter, Schutz's (1974) ideas of first and second order constructs are also relevant here, too: that the first order concerns the everyday activities of people, while the second order explores their significance and what lies underneath such sense-making. Whilst the discussion earlier in this chapter has been critical of Giddens' (1984) structuration, his view of the role of social scientists is pertinent, too – that they should aim to know what social actors know and (with my own addition) how they come to know 'it'.

The above position is tightly linked to the aim of my research project, and its concern with exploring the prevalence of a shared professional identity amongst careers guidance practitioners; and more fundamentally, the ways in which such an expression of identity reflects knowledgeable, active agency and more precise ways in which practitioners both

interact with and make their work settings. In short, I wanted to find out what they know, the meanings they make, how, and their wider significance.

3.4 Conclusions

Chapter two considered the purpose, nature, development and delivery settings of careers guidance from the perspectives of functionalism, structure and the profession's status. When seen through these lenses, the profession, particularly latterly, may seem weakly-professionalised, and lacking political leverage to resist government policies that have fundamentally changed its shape and workforce. In addition, recent literature that addresses the state of UK professions, particularly in the marketised public sector, is predicated on the managerialist/practitioner oppositional paradigm: that professionals are subject to the sovereign forces of neo-liberal managerialism. The literature and discourses directly concerning careers guidance reflect much of these debates. They tend to express the negative effects of government policies on provision and practitioners, and the idea of a Balkanised profession, with its practitioners defined by the contexts in which they work. Allied to these perspectives is the sense that, when discussing the professional identity of careers guidance practitioners, a more general definition is assumed, rather than one that is based on empirical evidence.

By contrast, this chapter has addressed the limitations of these perspectives and research. In addition, it has critically analysed theories, particularly structuration, that guide the formulation of my research and thesis. These theories have provided a platform for me to address the following limitations of the literature in the discussion chapter:

- The overly-deterministic view of professions in marketised public services;
- The sense that the careers guidance profession, and its practitioners, has been significantly weakened;

- The ways in which these perspectives overlook the ways in which individuals exercise, agency; and in so doing, construct and express that a professional identity that arises out of the contexts in which they operate, as well as being intrinsically formed;
- Further, the extent to which such overly-deterministic perspectives also ignore the particular and precise relationships between agency and structure;
- An example of the latter point is the way in which a more general definition of professional identity is adopted, when my research has sought to explore the existence of a commonly-shared identity, and one that is based in strong empirical evidence.

This chapter has also identified and justified my epistemological position that has guided my choice of the most appropriate methodology and method for my research, and my critical discussion in chapter four and six. The next chapter, then, will consider my research methodology and methods.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction: the relevance of grounded theory to my research aims

My choice of an interpretivist, qualitative research approach is most consistent with the aim of exploring experience and meanings (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) – in this case, of careers guidance practitioners' perceptions of their professional identity. Selecting grounded theory as both a methodology and a method (Charmaz, 2006) is the result of a number of methodological, professional (as in relating to my own professional experience) and practical considerations.

Firstly, and as indicated in my introductory chapter, my aim is to see if careers guidance practitioners in England have a professional identity, what this may be, and the extent to which they are shared and common aspects of such an identity. In short, the extent to which there is a common identity for careers guidance practitioners, rather than a series of professional identities that rely on the service provider context. Grounded theory is thus suitable, since its inductive approach is concerned with generating theory from data captured from qualitative (or quantitative) methods (such as interviews or participant observation) – from 'the ground upwards' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Its rigour and particular methods (Urquhart, 2013), which will be explored later in this section, offer a way in which I can both use the strengths of my experience and privileged access to research participants, and maintain a distance when collecting and analysing the data. This means that any assumptions I had concerning professional identity based on my previous experience would be checked; and as Charmaz (2006) notes, a grounded theory method can offer new researchers a range of approaches, techniques and even procedures to take advantage of and follow.

Further, the grounded theory method is also consistent with strong structuration (Stones, 2005), the main theoretical perspective adopted for my critical analysis. This is

based on a number of key points. Firstly, a grounded theory method would satisfy Stones' call for a strong epistemological and methodological basis for research that examines the relationship between agency and structure. Secondly, my chosen method also offers more precise tools, procedures and approaches that enable researchers to look at the particular ways in which people make meanings within their contexts. A grounded theory method also encourages the researcher to examine the meso-level and ontic level (Ibid.), where, in this case, policies concerning education and employment shape the provision in which practitioners operate. An additional point is that the aim of grounded theory of supporting the development of theories and models 'from the ground up' reflects strong structuration's concern with the interrelation between quite abstract societal forces, such as the characteristics of class and education, and their impact on everyday lives. In other words, the chosen research approach is consistent with my aim of critically appraising more general assumptions about the career guidance profession, and its practitioners, as discussed in chapter two.

A final point here is that my epistemological and ontological take on knowledge generation – that of a constrained idealist (Blaikie, 2010) – is also consistent with the aims of grounded theory to 'develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviour' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 30). That is, my research is not simply concerned with exploring experience; it aims to be generative in that it is seeking to establish a model of professional identity in careers guidance. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) point here is particularly apposite: that grounded theory aims to generate a theory that 'is a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents (p.57).'

In addition to offering guides for conducting research (as indicated by Strauss and Corbin, 1990), a grounded theory method also offers a challenge, too. The challenge is the extent to which my research will be substantive – relating to a particular area of enquiry – or

formal, that is, the theory could be applied to wider contexts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In seeking to explore participants' perceptions and then generate a model of professional identity, my research is focussed on the careers guidance profession, rather than seeking to construct a theory that may apply also to related professions, e.g. counselling, career coaching, and welfare and finance support. However, my theory offers aspects that chime with the professional identity of these associated roles, as well as critically appraising the more general discourse concerning the attack of managerialism on the professions (e.g., Banks, 2004, Evetts, 2005) as discussed in chapter two.

4.2 Applying the grounded theory approach

Part of the appeal of using grounded theory method is its apparent flexibility, and how its methods have been refined from Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original work, so that as Charmaz (2006: 9) points out, many grounded theory method researchers now focus on its 'guidelines such as coding, memo writing and sampling for theory development.' This approach to usage is supported by Reid (2007) when she noted how she adopted a grounded theory based approach when exploring the supervisory structures for new Connexions advisers in Kent.

In operationalising a grounded theory method for my research, the initial questions to address were: what data am I gathering; from whom; and how. Based on the answer to these questions, I gathered rich and complex data (Charmaz, 2006) from careers guidance practitioners' experience not just in relation to their roles but also from their wider contexts (personal and professional). In this way, the narrative is the data (Ibid.): the participants' stories of why and how they entered the careers guidance profession; what they sought to achieve; in what ways was the careers guidance role different from others they have occupied; their sense of their professional identity and its features; and the impact of their

service provider context on their sense of identity. This approach is also consistent with structuration's (e.g. Giddens, 1984, Bourdieu 1989) concern with the ways in which language is the key resource by which individuals interact within, and also shape, structures.

4.2.1 My method for capturing the data

The most obvious method for capturing such narratives is through interviews, as Stern (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007: 116) notes: 'social scientists...tend to rely on interviewing and observational data.' I chose to use semi-structured interviews as my research method as they offer a number of advantages. Firstly, they offer the researcher a way of encouraging participants to talk about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs and even more deeply-held values and emotions (Byrne, 2012). They can also offer a balance of a consistent structure, in terms of questions themes or areas, as well as flexibility. The former enables the researcher to compare and contrast responses under common question areas. The latter allows the researcher to respond to the narratives, probe them further and also assess the non-verbal cues offered by the participants which can then be noted as part of the data (Robson, 2011). An example from my own research here is to note the participants' reactions when asked if they feel they have a professional identity. The answer of 'yes' typed on the page does not capture the speed, force, doubt, reluctance or sheer enthusiasm that the participants expressed when answering in the affirmative. If all the responses were positive, and yet spoken hesitatingly, then these data may be treated differently than if all the expressions were far more immediate and enthusiastic. In addition, interviews offer the researcher insights into the ways in which the interviewees express and construct meanings (Silverman, 2011). This was considered a key advantage that links with my research aim of exploring the ways in which professional identity is both felt internally and expressed externally. One of the interview questions centred on participants' perceptions of the effect that the organisation in which they work has on their sense of identity – again, a point linked to my chosen theoretical perspective.

A further advantage of my research method is the way in which research participants may in some ways benefit from the interview experience. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) and Charmaz (2006) note, interviewers can give interviewees a chance to reflect on, express and even uncover meanings of their professional (and personal) lives in ways that may not have done before. Most of my interviewees noted just after the interview had finished that they found the interview useful, helpful and even supportive. The main aspect being that they found it liberating to have the researcher listen and show such interest and have positive regard for their experiences. This is in contrast to their experiences during a period of rapid sectoral change, critically explored in chapter two, when their discussions with managers were often concerned only with meeting performance targets and other operational matters. They identified a lack of opportunity to sit with a supportive mentor and simply be able to talk through experiences as a way of learning from them.

My choice of semi-structured interview as a method of gathering data was also for a strong practical reason. As a trained careers adviser, and as someone who now teaches and trains careers guidance practitioners, I have a high level of competence in interview skills which are grounded in the Egan approach (2014). These skills include: rapport making; asking initial open questions to encourage clients to tell their story; active listening and attending so that verbal and non-verbal communication is intensely listened to. Additional skills also cover: structuring the interview so that a fine balance is struck between allowing clients to pursue their narratives and maintaining an overall purpose and format (see Ali and Graham, 1996); reflecting back and summarising; and applying Schon's approach of reflection in action (1995) where the interviewer is simultaneously present in the interview, but is also monitoring, reflecting on and then making sense of the interview. The latter enables follow up questions and a stronger sense of the interviewee's story. In addition, the interview models which I have followed – and indeed teach – seek to embody the kind of

Rogerian unconditional positive regard for the interviewee which is underpinned by an ethical stance – particularly Kant’s respect for persons (Norman, 1998) – and which leads to practical benefits, e.g. encouraging the interviewee to talk.

A further advantage of the semi-structured interview as a method is that it is also consistent with the constant comparative method of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where new data as it is captured and then analysed may then be more easily compared with previous datasets where the responses fall under those headings. This also enabled me to gauge the point at which I have received theoretical saturation (Glaser, 1978), where no new categories are emerging, and that the responses to the interview questions are common. Charmaz (2006) also notes that interviews more generally as a research method not only capture participants’ narratives but they are also part of the theory generation process; in this way, the focus is not simply on exploring interesting stories as the end in itself. The need to be aware of the dual purpose of the interviews – gathering data for theory building – further strengthened my case for using semi-structured interviews, since they can maintain the balance between encouraging narratives and gathering data under common headings to enable the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

When evaluating the appropriateness of the semi-structured interview as a method, I also considered the potential advantages and relevance of other data gathering tools. One such method was focus groups. As Robson (2011) notes, they offer possible advantages, e.g. in terms of efficiency by gathering together a number of participants at once; and the group may have fitted with my aim of exploring the extent to which the members expressed a shared sense of identity (or at least debated the question). However, I rejected this method for a number of practical and methodological reasons. A major challenge of arranging focus groups is logistical (Ibid) – trying to get busy practitioners to the same venue for the same time. Given the demands on careers guidance practitioners, then arranging a focus may have

proved too challenging. Perhaps as importantly, focus groups often have the purpose of encouraging participants to discuss issues that may be of common concern to them (Tonkiss, 2011); and I could not assume that professional identity would be of interest to them. Still further, groups may generate their own dynamics which may prevent some participants from contributing freely, or in ways that are overly influenced by the need to maintain a consensus in the group (or, the reverse, to disagree with any emerging view!) (Hennick et al., 2011). Finally, I was also mindful that I wanted to explore narratives and stories, and the extent to which each participant felt she or he had a professional identity within the personal and professional context (Bryman, 2012). Interviewing individuals face-to-face offers richness of data that is not readily gained from a focus group. For these reasons, I decided to remain with the semi-structured interview as my sole method.

4.2.2 Sampling: theoretical underpinnings

For this part of my research process, there were a number of considerations that relate more generally to qualitative research and more particularly to a grounded theory method. To begin with, it is worth noting the crucial differences between quantitative and qualitative sampling strategies. Quantitative research methods use probability sampling based on the concept of the null hypothesis (Robson, 2011), i.e., where potential research participants have an equal chance of being included (or not) in the data collection, such as in the use of survey questionnaires that are mailed to the researcher's intended target population. By contrast, qualitative research tends to use non-probability sampling (Seale, 2012), where the sample is constructed purposively in line with the aim of the research project. This approach may apply particularly to exploratory research (Sarantakos, 2005) where the aim is not to prove an hypothesis, but to explore experiences and perceptions. The general technique, therefore, is to select purposely those who may be considered suitable for the research aims (Bryman, 2012). In this case, I was seeking to recruit careers guidance practitioners from a number of

different contexts that were representative of the sector. In seeking to construct a representative sample, it is worth noting here that the composition of the final sample, as listed below, comprised seventeen women and two men. This gender imbalance may reflect perceptions of the profession – that women tend to be in the majority of the workforce – (Peck, 2004) though there is a lack of extensive empirical evidence to document the labour configuration of the sector overall. I will explore my particular sampling criteria later in this section.

More particularly for a grounded theory method, the approach is driven by theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). The aim of this sampling approach is expressed by Glaser and Strauss (1967: 45) as follows:

‘a process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data, and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by emerging theory.’

The above stipulates a number of critical points that distinguish a grounded theory method from more generic qualitative sampling techniques (Hood, 2007). As Glaser and Strauss proposed (1967), the researcher begins with an initial sample selected for the purposes of research, collect data using an appropriate method, and then begin initial coding with a view to identifying some emerging categories. The subsequent sampling is in response to, or sensitive to, the emerging theory suggested by the categories; and the data are subject to the constant comparative analysis (Ibid.) with the initially emerging categories. The grounded theory method researcher is also searching for data or ‘negative cases’ (Charmaz, 2006: 157) that may contradict, or add more complexity to, the developing

categories and formulation (Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in order to strengthen the eventual theory.

In addition, Hood (2007) notes some key differences between the above and more general qualitative sampling. Firstly, that more general approaches develop sampling criteria that may be *a priori* in relation to the research aim. The sampling approach of a grounded theory method develops this further by being theoretically sensitive and contingent upon the emerging categories – that is, the latter is much more focused on the developing theory. The other key aspect is that more generic approaches to data gathering and analysis may be evolving and tend to concentrate on emerging themes, with some comparison between the data sets. This is in contrast to a grounded theory method, where the approach is to ‘focus on the development of theoretical categories via the constant comparative method, comparing data both to each other and to theoretical categories’ (Ibid.,:156). In essence, grounded theory sampling is driven by the emerging theory, rather than in response to more general issues raised by the research area.

These sampling procedures of a grounded theory method confirm my choice of this research approach in relation to my initial focus. My concern was to generate a model of professional identity as it relates to careers guidance, rather than a more exploratory study which, for example, may look at the effects of policies, or continuing professional development (CPD), on an assumed sense of identity (see Colley et al., 2011; Neary, 2014). These latter studies were exploratory, even polemical, in their conclusions concerning the negative effects of government policies on careers guidance in England (most notably, the introduction of the Connexions Service), and the potential role of CPD in bolstering and supporting practitioners’ esteem and identity. By contrast, my study is generative and not just exploratory in the way it seeks to build a model of professional identity across the profession.

4.2.3 My *a priori* sampling criteria

That said, the study did have initial *a priori* criteria (Bryman, 2012) in order that I collected data from a small case set in order to begin generating my categories. The criteria may be said to link to the approach taken by Karp (1985) in the way in which he selected particular aspects of his study, e.g. characteristics of his sample by age, role, number of years in service. The characteristics I selected are discussed as follows.

Firstly, practitioners who deliver careers information, advice and guidance using career related and labour market information, interviews, group work, and curriculum-based interventions. A generic role term for such staff would be careers advisers, but other variations would be acceptable, e.g. careers and employability consultants. Secondly, and initially, I sought to exclude those who work as Connexions Personal Advisers or similar and provided targeted services to disengaged young people as part of the statutory duty placed on local authorities by the Education Act (2011). The reason for this exclusion was that the focus of their work was less on careers guidance and more on holistic, more general welfare type support. These initial consideration also applied to those who worked in higher education (HE) as employability development consultants, since these roles are focussed on transition, almost placement-type of support without careers guidance and are new roles constructed as part of higher education institutions' strategic response to introduction of full fees (Browne, 2010). However, my subsequent theoretical sampling meant that I did collect data from two practitioners who held roles in these two areas (participants D and G respectively), with a view to finding negative cases (Charmaz, 2006), particularly as the participants concerned had successfully completed the Qualification in Career Guidance (QCG). In addition, I chose to include senior careers advisers, team leaders and similar who still provide information, advice and guidance services, since I was interested in the ways in which professional identity may be affected by supervisory responsibilities. Further, I

incorporated those who are qualified with NVQ 4 in Advice and Guidance; or QCG; or DipCG; or the AGCAS Post-Graduate Diploma. I did not stipulate a required number of years' experience, since I wanted to explore the sense of professional identity engendered in newly-qualified or newly-recruited practitioners. It proved fruitful to consider the perspectives of newly-qualified staff as well as those with more experience (and particularly those who qualified with the DipCG and have experienced a number of major re-organisations), as my data analysis shows in chapter seven.

I intended to recruit practitioners from a range of contexts in which careers guidance is delivered: schools; FE; HE; and adult guidance. In addition, I recruited those who now work as independent practitioners and provide services to schools or adults, since their notions of professional identity may deepen conceptions of what is beginning to constitute the new careers guidance professional. These contexts are representative of the sector in the UK. Finally, it was my aim to select candidates from the West Midlands region in England, since this area has a mix of urban and rural features, and has a varied educational and careers guidance provision, e.g. it has a mix of Russell Group and post – 1992 universities, as well as schools and FE colleges that serve the diverse populations of the urban and rural areas. In addition, and during the main period of the research, the area had a major careers guidance provider which was running a National Careers Services contract for adults in a variety of settings, including prisons.

As discussed above, my final sample showed a strong gender imbalance. I had aimed to recruit a more balanced sample, but at the same time I was reliant on those who volunteered in response to my call for participants. In the next section that immediately follows below, I set out in more detail the practicalities of my sampling approach.

4.2.4 Operating my sampling strategy – initial sampling and data gathering

Having set out my *a priori* sampling strategy (Bryman, 2012) above: that is, the basis on which I would make my initial selection of participations before then theoretically sampling (Glaser, 1978) further, I will now explain how I operationalised the particular sampling procedures of a grounded theory method. More particularly, I followed the approach for initial data collection by selecting cases (individuals from specific organisational contexts) that were consistent with my overall research focus (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The construction of this early purposive sample also reflected pragmatic considerations (Charmaz, 2014), e.g., ease of access to the participants, and the need to sample from contrasting provider contexts. Of the first five I interviewed, one was working as a careers adviser with the National Careers Services (NCS) in England; three were careers advisers from Higher Education (HE); and one was from FE. All were based in the West Midlands. The table below also illustrates the characteristics of the sample in terms of gender and experience, with some being relatively newly qualified, while others almost being historian-like in the extent of their employment.

In recruiting this initial sample, I approached managers from a variety of careers guidance providers in the region, and asked if they were willing to disseminate details of my research project, and the participant information sheet, to their staff. This was done by a general e-mail to all service staff. Volunteers were encouraged to contact me directly by e-mail without any need to notify their line managers or employers. The reasons for this approach were ethical and practical: firstly, so that the managers were aware of, and approved of, my research, and could see it as non-threatening; secondly, so that any staff involvement would be open and without involving any subterfuge or secrecy; and thirdly, the results of my theory building may well be relevant to the ways in which they recruited, managed and developed careers guidance practitioners. This method was informed partly by my

appreciation of the role of wider stakeholders (Friedman and Miles, 2006) in the conduct and dissemination of research. In short, I saw the ethical and practice benefits of gaining service managers' support for my work, as well as being able to gain access to research participants. Additionally, the extent of my profile in the sector, and especially the West Midlands, meant that I am well acquainted with the service managers concerned, and they were willing to co-operate without stipulating any conditions. In this way, I was re-assured that the potential participants could contact me freely. At the same time, I was aware of the potential for bias in seeking managers' support for disseminating information about the research, e.g., they may have suggested that certain practitioners should get involved, rather than others; or otherwise influenced those who volunteered, e.g., by asking about their involvement. The managers may have expressed their views about the research, too. However, they were clear that they circulated the details by staff e-mail only; and did not seek any further information or involvement in the research or recruitment of participants. As mentioned, they were willing to co-operate without any stipulations or conditions.

As well as these logistical considerations, Morse (2007: 231) identifies a number of principles to guide the selection of initial participants (and participants for the rest of the sampling), with one principle being the need to recruit 'excellent participants'. Excellence in this context would mean the ability and willingness to discuss and reflect on ideas of professional identity. This may seem an obvious point to make, but I took the fact that the participants contacted me readily as indications of such willingness. I conducted the first five interviews observing the ethical and practical considerations noted above. The interactions were recorded, and then I transcribed them after each interview. Again, the reasons for this were practical and in line with a grounded theory method. Firstly, listening to and then transcribing the interviews within a day or so of each meeting with the participant meant that my recollections of the discussions were still fresh in my mind. I could recall accurately the

ways in which the participants communicated both verbally and non-verbally. Leaving the transcription until later would have dimmed these recollections, and thus reduced a further means of data capture and analysis (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). In terms of grounded theory, it is important to transcribe and then analyse the early data for emerging patterns and categories to then enable theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978) as discussed in the previous chapter. At a more ethical and philosophical level, I wanted to retain the link between the participants' words and the way, and indeed the sense, that they were being communicated. Retaining the link between the words and the subject (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002) is a way in which qualitative research retains its rigour and trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005), since the participants and all their histories that in part shape such sense-making (Garfinkel, 1967) are not simply reduced to lines of text.

Please see appendix one for my initial codes.

4.2.5 Theoretical sampling: the composition of the sample

As mentioned when discussing my *a priori* sample, my overall aim was to recruit careers guidance practitioners from school, FE, HE, adult guidance and self-employed settings in the West Midlands. My theoretical sample thus took account of this aim, as well as addressing the concerns raised above when I considered the elements of my tentative theory, such as the gaps in my initial sample, e.g., I had no participants who worked in schools – an area of particularly rapid policy change and professional turmoil (Colley et al., 2010; Watts and McGowan, 2007) as noted in the Introduction to the PhD. Secondly, I was keen to review the operation of the interview and the questions I had formulated, so as to check for their robustness and continuing fitness for purpose (Miller and Glassner, 2011).

A full table of the final sample is included below.

4.2.6 Full table of participants

Participant identifier	Careers guidance qualifications	Practice setting	Length of time in CG role	Gender
A	QCG gained within the last five years	National Careers Service (NCS)	4	Female
B	QCG gained within the last five years	Higher Education (HE)	3	Female
C	QCG gained within the last five years	HE	5	Female
D	QCG gained within the last five years	HE	4	Female
E	QCG gained within the last five years	FE	4	Female
F	QCG gained within the last five years	FE	4	Female
G	QCG gained within the last five years; NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	Targeted NEET provision	10	Female
H	QCF level 4 gained within the last five years	NCS	8	Female
J	NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	FE	8	Female
K	Dip CG gained over twenty five years ago	FE	35	Female
L	QCF level 4 gained within the last five years	School	10	Female
M	Diploma in Personal Adviser work	School	10	Female
N	DipCG gained within the last twenty years	Self-employed: adult guidance	21	Female
P	NVQ 4 gained within the last five years	Self-employed: school guidance	13	Female
Q	NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	School	12	Female
R	Dip CG gained within the last twenty-five years	School	34	Female
S	Dip CG gained within the last twenty-five years	NCS	36	Female
T	QCF level 4 gained within the last five years	NCS	5	Male

U	QCG gained within the last five years and NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	NCS	12	Male
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To summarise, the composition included: three from HE, each with the QCG; five from the National Careers Service (NCS) settings, with a variety of qualification; four from FE, also with a variety of qualifications (one of whom had thirty-five years' experience in careers guidance); four from school settings, also with a variety of qualifications; two from self-employed settings, both with the DipCG or QCG; and one from a targeted setting, working with young people who were disadvantaged, who holds the QCG. The sample reflects the rapid and deep changes to the sector and the profession that have occurred since the Connexions Service was introduced in 2001; and since employability and the skills agenda have become more mission critical to both FE and HE – in particular, the introduction of top-up and the full fees for HE (Browne Review, 2013), and the perennial concern with lifting the skills of the UK workforce (Leitch Review, 2006; Higher Ambitions, 2009). Whilst chapter two discussed the policy changes in detail, some of its points are worth iterating here in relation to the characteristics of the sample. The details below are also consistent with aspects of my chosen theoretical perspective: that of the meso-level and ontic-level (Stones, 2005), which look at the more specific external structures – in this case, relevant government policies – and the specifics of the service provider contexts. In addition, the specific features also reflect the impact of historical government policies, and the expected functions of careers guidance, as discussed in chapter two.

Firstly, those who work in the schools and NCS tend to hold work-based qualifications, such as the NVQ 4, or newer QCF level 4 (though not exclusively). This in part reflects the pattern of training newly recruited staff for Connexions (and more latterly, the NCS) in these newer, work-based information, advice and guidance qualifications rather

than the new QCG (Colley et al., 2010). It also reflects the wider remit of the Personal Adviser role as it was conceived (Watts and McGowan, 2007) to cover more holistic aspects of personal support, not simply careers guidance. More seriously, it demonstrates the breaking of the entry route and its requirements for statutory careers guidance work in England, i.e. that careers advisers would undertake the DipCG for one year with a provider accredited by the Local Government Management Training Board (LGMTB), followed by one year's probationary practice supervised by an accredited training manager. Connexions simply did not require this entry route. Three of the five participants who hold the DipCG qualification (though one had since left the profession) expressed a common view of the damage that the introduction of Connexions caused the careers guidance profession (as noted by Artaraz, 2006; and most powerfully by Watts, 2014). The fourth had gained experience of school work before moving into HE careers work; and then becoming self-employed. This participant's view of sectoral changes was perhaps tempered by the career development and by the challenges of running a business.

Secondly, the ways in which those from FE and HE tended to have more highly qualified staff, often at QCG level. This tends to reflect these organisations' preference (though not exclusively so) for higher level qualifications that have more portability, rather than being developed for, and contingent upon, the Connexions' setting. This preference can be viewed as an interesting development from the HE service model that was prevalent even up until the early 1990s before the recession of that time: that of appointments-styled services that acted as gatekeepers for graduate recruiters; and whose staff tended to be recruited from such backgrounds without necessarily holding a professional qualification (Watts, 1996).

Thirdly, this variety of qualifications, settings and length of experience of the participants allowed me to deepen, review, question and then start to build my theory. For example, the largely firm responses to my question regarding the initial participants' sense of

professional identity were mirrored by all of those who were theoretically sampled. In other words, this firm sense of identity did not appear to be limited to one specific setting, e.g. HE. The sample variety gave me confidence in the reliability and the trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005) of the methods I had used and in the theory which I was building: that careers guidance practitioners do have a shared professional identity.

Finally, I ceased sampling and gathering data when I had reached theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2014) – that is, the new data I was gathering iterated previous data, and I was not encountering any exceptions to my initial theory or theoretical categories. After the initial five, the point of reaching saturation was after I had sampled fourteen more participants. For example, all of them expressed the firm view that careers guidance is a profession, and they felt that they had a professional identity. Put more simply, I was ‘hearing nothing new’ (Noerager Stern, 2007: 117). The emerging elements of this identity were also common and shared despite the variety of backgrounds, qualifications, practice settings and length of service. As a result, I did not need to seek any further data.

Having now considered both general and specific issues in relation to my sampling methodology and methods, I will now critically consider the grounded theory approach to coding and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) that a researcher would follow. This will preface my data presentation and analysis chapter which will fully explore the ways in which I applied such techniques to generating categories and my theory of professional identity.

4.2.7 Coding: concepts and approaches

As discussed in the previous section, data in grounded theory method is aimed at generating theory. To achieve the latter, Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978), and Strauss and Corbin (1990) identified a number of techniques and approaches to analysing the

data captured by methods such as interviews. These have been refined subsequently by theorists and writers, such as Charmaz (2006), Bryant and Charmaz (2007), and Urquhart (2013).

According to grounded theory, the data needs to be coded, analysed, re-coded and re-analysed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Proponents of grounded theory method appear to agree that open coding is the beginning of the coding process, as Urquhart (2013) observes. More specifically, open coding is ‘where conceptual labels are placed on discrete happenings’ and reflects a ‘process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61). More simply, Urquhart indicates that ‘open coding is about attaching labels to your data (which) are subsequently grouped into larger codes, as the aim is to build a theory based on them’ (2013: 24). To illustrate this approach, Strauss and Corbin (1997) considered a research project conducted with those who were terminally ill and the ways in which the participants were experiencing the process. The concepts and their dimensions identified by the open coding were: the awakening to death; dealing with uncertainty; definitions of illness and disability; and how the participants maintained their sense of self. The data were also examined further by gender, that is, the ways in which responses from men differed, or chimed with, those from women. These concepts became the categories upon which the emerging theory was based: that of the experience of identity in response to the dilemmas posed by the prospect of dying. (Ibid.). Thus, an essential task of the researcher when using open coding is to identify categories and their dimensions that are consistently emerging from the data.

To aid category identification and generation, Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that the researcher needs to use memos when analysing the data in order to summarise and capture the overarching essence of the experience that is being related by the participants. This technique also assists with the need to constantly question the data during the constant

comparative approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), where new data is evaluated by reference to categories that have identified from previous coding. Such constant questioning of the data and the emerging categories is viewed as part of the process of enhancing theoretical sensitivity (Ibid.), so that the researcher needs to remain vigilant to prevent the impact of stereotypical assumptions on the generation of a theory which may become too facile and insufficiently grounded. For Urquhart (2013: 23), the constant comparative method 'gives grounded theorists the edge'. Charmaz (2006) is particularly strong on the need for researchers to free themselves of preconceptions, and argues that only line by line analysis of, say, a transcribed interview, will enable them to really know the data and thus generate accurate codes. This is a further aspect of generating trustworthy and reliable qualitative research (Ponterotto and Greiger, 2007): the thorough scrutiny of data to produce justifiable and grounded theories.

If grounded theorists agree on the first stage as open coding, then subsequent coding appears subject to some variation in approach and terminology. For example, Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify axial coding as the next stages before selective coding, in contrast to Glaser (1992) who identifies selective coding as the next stage. A further twist on the coding method is added by Charmaz (2006) who lists initial coding, focused coding (her own label for selective coding), axial coding and theoretical coding. At this point, it is useful to consider the different methods, and refinements, ahead of the data analysis chapter.

Firstly, axial coding recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990: 96) is where the data is 'put back together again' after open coding 'opens up' the data in order to identify the categories that lead to the initial codes. In their view, this procedure requires the researcher to think more deeply, more theoretically, about the data, by using a coding paradigm that seeks to identify the conditions and the context of the initial codes, as well as what actions

lead to them. I will use an example here from my interview data to illustrate this point (though as mentioned, the coding of the data, and the emerging theory, will be presented more fully in the next chapter). One of the first main codes that I identified from the open coding process was ‘motivation to enter the careers guidance profession.’ This could stand as a theme in its own right if I had adopted a more general qualitative method to analysing my data (Hood, 2007). However, my choice of grounded theory method prompted me to interrogate the data further and consider the dimensions of the code, such as the particular motivations, and the conditions and context that led the participants to enter the profession. One such condition was the need to move from a role, such as human resource management, which had become too managerial (Evetts, 2005) in its focus at the expense of supporting and enabling others; with this latter aspect – helping others to develop their careers – was one that the participants saw careers guidance as offering. The actions here were also internal, e.g. that the participants felt that they had become inauthentic, in that their values were no longer congruent with the HR role; and so they sought to become more authentic by moving into a careers guidance role. In this way, the main code (in this case, of ‘motivation to enter the careers guidance profession’) has been analysed further for its theoretical implications by exploring its sub-codes and axials (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

I agree with Urquhart (2013) that axial coding presents a challenge in terms of grasping its actual concept, let alone the practice. Indeed she asserts that this apparent complexity of approach is ‘why students in particular come unstuck at this point’ (2013: 25). Perhaps easier to grasp is the Glaserian approach of selective coding (Glaser, 1978, 1992). This is where the open codes are grouped together to form the higher level codes which then become essential to the emerging core codes; and occurs at a point where no new codes are emerging from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, as Charmaz (2006) points out, the researcher is bound to bring some initial grouping of codes as the analysis proceeds as

part of the process of constant comparison, and this grouping may prompt the researcher to revisit the open codes as the data are interrogated and analysed more deeply.

As Urquhart (2013) indicates, it may appear that the grounded theory method researcher needs to choose between the Glaserian approach of selective coding, or the Straussian method of axial coding. In my view, Charmaz's approach (2006, 2014) of focused coding seems to offer a way of combining the strengths of these two apparently separated routes. This method encourages the researcher to identify the 'most significant and/or frequent earlier codes' so that they begin to make 'the most analytic sense to categorize (the) data incisively and completely' (Charmaz, 2014: 138). It also allows the initial codes to be revisited and refined. Axial coding can be used but only as it supports the emerging analytic approach by encouraging the researcher to develop an 'analytic frame' (Ibid: 149) rather than as a procedure as detailed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In this way, the coding paradigm (Ibid.) is a tool which can help the researcher's developing theoretical sensitivity (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Again, I can use a brief example from my own coding. The first main code of 'motivation to join the careers guidance profession' (see the data chapter, table one), was the product of linking sub-codes and axials, and developed my sensitivity to the emerging theory of professional identity – especially concerning the core condition of client-centeredness. In essence, using focused coding as detailed by Charmaz (2014), but drawing on axial coding approaches to enhance my theoretical sensitivity, I was able to see and sense my developing theory of professional identity as it applies to careers guidance as a whole.

I have mentioned briefly that the outcome of open and focused coding was my developing theory. In order for the latter to occur fully there is a final stage of grounded theory method coding: theoretical coding. This is expressed by Glaser (1978) as the ways in which the substantive codes that have emerged from the selective (or focused coding) coding process are related, linked and integrated into a theory. As grounded theory method theorists

note (see especially Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2014), there are methodological and procedural issues and questions to consider during the theoretical coding stage – if, indeed, this stage is required or even helpful to the overall theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Firstly, there is the status and role of prior knowledge; and the extent to which this may lead to preconceptions that may affect the emergence of the theory from the data, and adversely affect validity and trustworthiness (Robson, 2011). Earlier in this section, I discussed the advantage of situatedness (Patton, 2002) to the research process, e.g. in the ways it can increase understanding of, and insights into, the experiences which the participants are trying to articulate during the research interview. Equally, the situated researcher could also interpret the data in ways that are adversely affected by preconceptions (Bryman, 2012) that rest on previously developed knowledge sets. (Jarvis, 2006). A more specific, counter argument to the latter (and in relation to grounded theory method), existing knowledge, whether it be based on professional experience or familiarity with theoretical concepts, may help to increase theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978). Kelle (2007: 207) notes that existing theoretical concepts or categories, e.g. relating to culture, identity and structure – concepts which may have no firm empirical, testable basis, but which are proposed by theorists – ‘can sensitise the researcher to identify theoretically relevant phenomena in the field.’ In this way, existing knowledge becomes sensitising and not definitive.

Although I consider my data more fully in the next chapter, I can use a brief example to illustrate Kelle’s point, based on my own existing knowledge and research. My awareness of professionalism and professional identity has developed over my career due to my general interest in the topic. This meant that I was aware of the psychological, organisational and sociological aspects of identity formation; and so these insights increased my range of questions that I was asking of the data. Further, I also felt that any existing definitions of professional identity (e.g. Ibarra, 1999, as used by Neary, 2013) were too broad and not

adequate enough to apply to the careers guidance sector. My approach has been not to assume such a definition, but to build one in a way that engages with existing concepts but is not limited by them.

Having evaluated the strengths of existing knowledge for theoretical coding, I can now turn to the actual process. The Glaserian/Straussian divide, alluded to in relation to the second stage of coding after the open one, continues here (Urquhart, 2013). Glaser and Strauss (1967) and more specifically Glaser, (1978) define theoretical coding as the ways in the substantive codes emerging from the selective stage are then linked to form families and eventually the superstructure of the emerging theory. This process may be attended by such techniques as memo writing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to enable the researcher to capture such linkages and emerging theories. Urquhart (2013) noted the value of the latter in her own research. Strauss and Corbin (1990) propose a different approach, where axial coding (discussed above) identifies dimensions, even paradigms amongst the codes. These are then put together during the selective coding stage so that a story or narrative emerges, i.e. the theory.

For the inexperienced researcher, the challenges posed by the second stage of grounded theory coding is amplified at this apparently final stage – that is, which method should be used: theoretical coding as per Glaser; or selective coding as per Strauss and Corbin. As noted previously, Charmaz (2014) offers a useful pragmatic view concerning the advantages and potential drawbacks of theoretical coding. In her view, such coding ‘can add precision and clarity – as long as they fit your data and substantive analysis’ (Ibid: 151). From this, the challenge for the researcher is not to follow an orthodoxy for its own sake, but to constantly review and evaluate the appropriateness of the research tools. To use my own example, and as the next chapter will discuss this, I found aspects of the axial coding approach to be useful when exploring the dimensions of the emerging main codes, since I

was interested in the perceived properties and constructs of professional identity for careers guidance practitioners; and from these, what overarching narrative was emerging. However, this apparently Straussian approach did not mean I excluded Glaserian considerations of theoretical sensitivity and some of the techniques such as memo writing. As Charmaz (2014) notes, it is the data and the emerging categories that drive the methods to use, rather than an orthodox adherence to principle set by a particular grounded theory method school.

This chapter will now consider finally the outcome of the process of sampling, data gathering, coding, and its different stages: the theory. Theoretical coding (as per Glaser, 1978), or selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), have a common aim: to show how the final codes relate and link to produce a theory (or in my case, a model) that seeks to answer the initial research question. In the case of my own research, what has emerged from the grounded theory method I applied is a model of professional identity for careers guidance. At the stage of finalising my theory, it is worth iterating two points that were made earlier in this chapter when I considered my choice of grounded theory method. Firstly, my theory is substantive and not formal (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in that I am seeking to propose a formulation that applies to careers guidance, and not a more generalisable theory of professional identity as it may apply to other professions and contexts. However, and as my discussion chapter shows, there are aspects of my model, e.g. the importance of ethics to professional identity, that have relevance beyond careers guidance and other guidance, counselling and support roles, such as counselling and social work. The second key point – and this is linked to the development of my substantive model – is that my grounded theory method is consistent with the constructivist rather than objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014). This may seem obvious, in that I have adopted an overall qualitative research paradigm; but the aspects of the constructivist approach that Charmaz identifies, e.g. the aim of interpretive understanding, the situatedness of the researcher, and the construction of

categories (Ibid: 236) mean that I could not aim for objective, neutral concepts that are definitive beyond the chosen area of research.

4. 3 Ensuring quality in research: general concerns

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, my choice of grounded theory method has been based partly on the need for a rigorous method and associated set of processes. This has been to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of my research. These are critical concerns for qualitative research (Sarantakos, 2005) and research more generally. However, these concerns are expressed differently in relation to quantitative and qualitative research. The former, in its concern with quantifying and measuring phenomena, and establishing associations and correlations between variables, must be based on methods that are valid, reliable, replicable and generalizable (Bryman, 2012). A guiding methodological principle, too, is invalidating the null hypothesis, which rests on the assumption that the phenomena is the result of chance, rather than any associations or correlations between factors (Pole and Lampard, 2002). By contrast, qualitative research, in its concern with exploring the ways in which reality is made meaningful by consciousness (Sarantakos, 2005), is not predicated on establishing statistically verifiable results that show the effect of one factor, or a range of factors, e.g., class, gender or ethnicity, on, say, career outcomes.

However, questions of quality are as pertinent to qualitative research. For instance, Morrow (2005) argues that quality and trustworthiness are equivalent to reliability and replicability. That is, whilst the results are not meant to be generalizable and applicable to the behaviour of individuals more widely, they must be trustworthy, and gathered ethically and rigorously. This is most especially because the theories are based on valuable, and often unique, personal stories and testimonies of how people live in society. For participants to trust researchers with such precious narratives, must mean that the methods and approach

repay this trust. In addition, qualitative research can amplify the findings of quantitative research; and suggest further, wider scale research projects.

4.3.1 Ethical approval clearance

I sought ethical approval from the university where I have been registered in line with their procedure. The latter embodied critical research principles that need to be followed when gathering often personal and potentially sensitive information (Sarantakos, 2005). One such principle is non-malificence (or doing no harm): that the process of the research enquiry, and the tools used, are proportionate and focussed on the study in question, rather than the researcher engaging in a more intrusive process, e.g. by asking questions and seeking data that is irrelevant to the participants. Second, social scientific researchers need to guarantee anonymity for the participants, e.g. by ensuring that any direct quotes are non-attributable; and third, the need to store and then protect data to safeguard anonymity, e.g. using password protected and encrypted files. For my research, the latter considerations were very important, as some of the research participants were facing a period of considerable policy and organisational change.

This potential sensitivity was ameliorated by a further research principle: that is trust and integrity (Robson, 2011). As identified in my ethical approval documentation, I was not seeking to persuade, lead or provoke participants into making potentially controversial or inflammatory statements regarding their role, the organisation they work for, or the profession more generally. Further, the interview questions were aimed at gathering data to help answer the initial research focus, and did not delve into sensitive personal or professional issues in a manipulative manner (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

In this way, my approach was consistent with the principles and ethics that have underpinned my own guidance practice: not only in observing confidentiality and data

protection, but also in recognising the relative position of power an interviewer has in relation to the client or the research participant (Bryman, 2012). That power, which in part rests in such skills and approach as unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961) and active listening, must therefore be used responsibly and ethically, and not because the researcher wants to pry into personal areas (Ali and Kelly, 2012). I also continually reflected on my role, profile and status within the sector, and also being a male researcher interviewing mainly female participants. Overall, the data collection should be conducted by a skilled, principled research investigator who is guided by ethical principles such as non-maleficence, is focused on the research question, and seeks to embody high levels of trust and integrity.

An important tool in gaining participants' involvement and trust is obtaining informed consent (Sarantakos, 2005). To gain this, the researcher must produce a clear and unambiguous description of the research aims and process. A particular aspect for me to include was that since the interviews were recorded, the participants needed to feel comfortable with this aspect of the interview. The aim of the participant information sheet (PIS) is to 'ensure that the research participants are able to decide for themselves what is in their best interests and what risks they are prepared to take' (Ali and Kelly, 2012: 66). In my case, I sought to minimise the risks by constructing a schedule of questions that were non-controversial, as well as assuring the participants of their anonymity.

Having gained ethical approval – a process which also scrutinises the robustness of the proposed research design – I was then able to begin the process of selecting and recruiting my research participants.

4.3.2 Research skills: interviewing participants; and the skills of reflection

As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, my career so far, and the roles I have occupied, gave me privileged access to contexts and practitioners when conceiving of my

research, and implementing my plan. Further, I have also set out the ways in which my careers guidance interviewing skills transferred well to the interviewing process. However, I have been clear about the potential drawbacks of my knowledge and skills, e.g., knowing a little too much about the sector, and perhaps seeking to unduly influence or lead the participants with my questioning, thereby affecting the quality and trustworthiness of my research, and its claims.

To mitigate the potential risks, I adopted a number of strategies to promote the quality of my research. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) emphasise, research interviewers need to be aware of the potential impact that their biases and values can have on the participants and the interview process. One key approach I took to address this aspect was to adopt reflection in action (Schon, 1995) during the interviews. I constantly monitored and evaluated my approach, the questions I was asking, and their effects on the participants. This evaluation took place at the same time as listening acutely to the narratives, and being able to ask follow up questions. The ability of interviews to operate at different levels of consciousness – being simultaneously present and yet evaluative – is one discussed at some length by Egan (2014). From my own experience as an educator, it is an approach I teach, and encourage students to engage in fully, in order to help promote ethical practice. I also transferred it to the research interviews, so that I was constantly appraising the conduct and experience of an interview.

Charmaz (2006) also identifies the need for intensive interviewing when generating grounded theory – an approach which can also be evident in guidance, especially when working with clients who need a career counselling approach. Such intensity does not necessarily imply the need to delve into participants' narratives in ways that may turn the research interview into a psychotherapeutic one, as this would be unethical (Ibid.). Rather, the intensity in my view concerns the concentrated and active listening to the participant, so that what is being said and how is made sense of.

Additionally, I was also aware of the ways in which credibility and trustworthiness can be adversely affected by the ways in which research interviewer and participant co-construct a reality during the interview (Hennick et al., 2011). This reality can be developed by the interviewer's rapport-making skills; and these are necessary to encourage the participant to engage fully in the process. However, this rapport may affect the researcher's ability to maintain a measure of distance, so that the issues of bias may affect the subsequent progress of the interview. For example, there was a possible risk that my extensive experience of, and insights into, the sector, and my extensive network profile, could have led to the participants reacting to those factors; and thus not have responded as freely or in ways that they might imagine I might have wanted.

A further linked factor, of which I needed to be aware, was that the reality of the interview that I and the participants constructed may become one of sympathy for the difficulties that the interviewees face during a period of rapid sectoral change. The participants may have drawn me into endorsing their views on the ways in the esteem of the careers guidance profession has declined over the last two decades. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) note, it is important for the researcher to establish boundaries for the interview, both when recruiting the participants, e.g. ensuring that consent is freely given and the purpose of the research is understood; and during the interview, so that (in my case) I maintained my position as a researcher and acted almost as if I was unfamiliar with the participants and their histories. This skill of suspending judgement and assumptions (Egan, 2014) again is one which I practised constantly when working as a careers adviser (and indeed as a manager, perhaps more so in this role when dealing with staff!). Finally on this issue of maintaining the integrity of the interview as an ethical and reliable process (Silverman, 2011), the awareness of the role of interviews in grounded theory method, and of the potential pitfalls which can affect the trustworthiness of the data gathering, enabled me to reflect constantly on

the conduct and results of the interviews. This point will be explored in more detail when I consider my data analysis.

The above strategies and approaches were key in enabling me to prepare and then conduct the interviews ethically, and with quality a foremost consideration. In reviewing the interviews, as part of the grounded theory method's processes, I used two models of reflection: Gibbs's (1988) and Kolb's (1984). The former model allowed me to reflect on some of the practicalities of the interviews. For example, I was able to reflect on my own feelings and observations during the interview, and also gauge the participants' reactions to the process, based on their willingness to talk, and how comfortable they felt. I then evaluated the process to see which aspects needed to be adjusted or changed; and which could remain as intended. For example, and as the consideration of the data will show subsequently, nearly all of the participants struggled with the question of what professional identity meant to them. However, I decided to retain this question, since I wanted to give them a chance to express a view; and it was also interesting to see how the term 'professional identity' seemed challenging when much of their interview narrative had been concerned with expressing such a way of being in their role. The adjustment I made was to preface the question with re-assurances that it was not a test, and that if the term meant nothing, then the participants were free to say so.

The Kolb (1984) model perhaps applied more fully when I considered my coding approaches and processes: that is, I gained a deeper appreciation and conceptualisation of aspects of grounded theory method, especially in relation to the coding stages and methods as discussed in the previous chapter. An example of this is noting the differences in the Glaserian and Straussian approaches to the second stage of coding (Urquhart, 2013) – with the latter's use of selective coding (Glaser, 1978) and the former's focus on axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In this way, my grasp of grounded theory method was deepened

by this experiential learning, which the stage of abstract conceptualisation (Kolb, 1984) captures.

4.4 Conclusions

In summary, this chapter has critically discussed and analysed my choice of an overall qualitative research paradigm. This choice arose in large part as a result of reviewing my epistemological and ontological positions as noted in chapter three; and the ways in which my own stance has affected my overall research methodology and approach. From this, I have argued the ways in which my chosen strategy – grounded theory method – is consistent with my research position and the overall research question; and the fact that it offers practical techniques that are supported by a large range of literature.

After these methodological considerations, I critically examined the ways in which my chosen method of data collection – semi-structured interviews – draws on the strengths of my own skill set, and afforded me the chance to capture rich data from participants concerning the ways in which they perceive their professional identity. After capturing the data, I needed to choose which coding techniques were most suitable to my research focus; and so I engaged in a critical review of the various coding techniques that result in theory (or model) generation. Throughout the process, I have been careful to note the limitation of my model generation, and how it relates to careers guidance without making definitive claims for other professions (though it offers insights that are applicable, e.g. in relation to ethics). Finally in this chapter, I have examined the ways in which the risks to the quality and trustworthiness of my research have been addressed by the ethical approval process, the skills of interviewing, and the reflective approach, to ensure that any biases were identified and addressed.

The next chapter presents analyses my research data, based on the sampling, interviewing and coding approach discussed above. The presentation and analysis is shaped and influenced by the theoretical perspectives I discussed in chapter three, and most particularly the elements of strong structuration (Stones 2005).

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings from my data collection and analysis, which provides the foundation for my model of professional identity. It has been organised with three key aspects in mind. The first is that the presentation is shaped by the coding procedure I followed as informed by the grounded theory method discussed in chapter four. In particular, the tables for each major coding category feature the selective codes and their axials, or dimensions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The second concerns the extent to which these codes reflect the participants' narratives, and sense-making, within the contexts that they have sought to shape and influence, and as part of their career development. To this end, each coding category emerges from, and is supported by, participants' quotes; the critical discussion of the significance of the data for my thesis is left for the next chapter. In addition, the significance of the various organisational contexts on the data analysis is also considered, particularly illustrated in tables 2 to 5. The third, which is linked to the latter, is the critical importance of the theoretical perspectives I have used (discussed in chapter three), and those that I have critically appraised (discussed in chapter two) have also framed my approach to the analysis. In combination, these three aspects have enabled me to address my research aim.

A summary of the perspectives that I have considered, and used to frame my analysis, is as follows:

- The limitations of the functionalist, and structure-based view of the professions, and the overly-deterministic and gloomy discourse that have characterised much of the recent literature concerning careers guidance as a profession;

- The ways in which current discourse concerning the professions – particularly those that have examined the managerialist and practitioner paradigm (Evetts, 2005) – often overlook the role of individual's agency;
- The adoption of generic definitions of professional identity when discussing careers guidance practitioners' response to policy and organisational change;
- The advantages offered by strong structuration (Stones, 2005), and its call for robust epistemology and methodology, to research that seeks to explore and establish in more precise terms the relationship between structure and agency; and
- The consistency between strong structuration and my chosen epistemological position, that of a constrained idealist, to my adoption and operation of grounded theory method.

This chapter will consider first the early, tentative codes and the emerging narrative from my initial sampling, before then presenting the substantial codes and supporting evidence that emerged from my theoretical sampling – approaches that were discussed and justified in chapter four.

5. 2 Initial codes and emerging narrative

My initial sample for analysis comprised five participants as identified in chapter four above. Once I had my transcriptions, I then began the process of identifying tentative categories and codes. It is interesting to note that the major proponents of grounded theory method and its development (Glaser, 1978, Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2014) produce examples of what these first open codes might look like. That is, their examples confirm the art (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of transforming responses to interview questions into comprehensible, substantive codes on which theory can be built. In this way, the coding process is partly an experiment in applying the principles and procedures of grounded theory

method. Firstly, I grouped the responses according to the structure of the interview questions. This approach seemed to be the most convenient way to begin the analysis. Under these areas, I teased out elements or aspects as a way of examining their potential for developing into open codes (Charmaz, 2014). The initial open codes that emerged from my analysis of the first five interviews are noted in Appendix 1.

From this, an emerging, tentative theory began to emerge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), or perhaps more precisely, an overall narrative (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) which featured consistencies in the experience of being a careers guidance practitioner. As part of the operationalisation of grounded theory method, I expressed the elements of this narrative as follows:

- Practitioners sought to enter the profession in order to help people choose appropriate career paths and enact these choices;
- The role offered the chance to work in client-centred ways that could transform clients' lives;
- It was in part a rejection of the ethics of previous roles or organisational practices that sought to manage human resources for company gain rather than individual growth;
- The careers guidance role was perceived to offer autonomy and the chance to express ethical occupational values of client-centredness and support;
- The role was more authentic and matched the participants' developing self-concept (Super, 1963);
- That the professional qualification undertaken (in these cases, the QCG) was the foundation of their ethical practice.

From my notes and memo writing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), I was able to identify and reflect on the salience of ethics; client-centred practice; and career authenticity; and how,

even though the initial sample was small, these features were common to all despite the participants' organisational settings. One aspect that did make me cautious – and critical of my tentative narrative (Charmaz, 2014) – was that all of the five participants did have the QCG, which has a strong emphasis on professional codes of ethics and values (CDI, 2014). In other words, would other narratives from those without this qualification identify and stress these elements in the same way? This question helped to sensitise further my interrogation of the data from subsequent interviews with those who had different levels of qualification. That said, the level 7 qualification also features careers guidance theory, partnership working, current UK government policies and their effect on practice; and yet none of the initial five identified the importance of theories of career choice to their work. Instead, the aspect that the participants expressed most readily was client-centeredness.

This narrative, and the questions I have outlined above, gave the platform to then theoretically sample (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) further participants to deepen, amplify, appraise, revise and categorise all of my initial coding.

5.3 The main codes, their sub-codes and their axials

In generating my substantive codes, my second stage of coding was more in line with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) process of generating axials, since I felt that exploring and defining the dimensions of these reflected the properties that the participants identified in their answers. Or, to express it another way, the ways in which meanings were being constructed (Charmaz, 2014). What follows in tables 1 to 5 below is a presentation of each major code, its sub-codes and axials and quotations from the participants to illustrate the dimensions or elements. The tables have been grouped under the following sections, and

linked, e.g., Table 1 and 2 that concern motivation to enter the profession, and satisfaction and dissatisfactions respectively, are grouped under section 5.4 below.

5.4 Careers guidance: motivations to enter the profession; and satisfactions and dissatisfactions

In this section, Tables 1 and 2 present the codes concerning the participants' motivations to enter the profession, and the satisfactions and dissatisfactions derived from their work. These tables are presented under the same section to the linkages between the two codes, e.g., in the ways in which the participants derived satisfaction from their roles by realising their values and beliefs in client-centred practice; and to illustrate an emerging picture of active agency – a theme developed in more depth when Table 5 is considered.

Table 1: Careers guidance and motivation to enter the profession

Main Code	Sub-codes	Axials
1. Motivation to enter the profession	1a) Active change of occupational context: HR/recruitment to guidance (n=9) Job Centre Plus to guidance (n=2)	From 'gatekeeper' to 'guidance, support and development' From 'constrained' to 'more autonomy' From 'contingent choice' to 'positive choice to enter profession' From 'managing performance' to 'developing staff' From 'managerial' to 'ethical'
	1b) Influence of encounters with careers guidance staff: para-professional roles in education to guidance (n = 6)	From 'lower status work' to 'higher status work' From 'lower paid work' to 'higher paid work' From 'lack of professional training' to 'professional training' From 'redundancy' to 'retaining educational ethos'
	1c) Initial career choice after graduating (n= 2)	Focus on helping others rather than 'making money' Structured LGMTB training Wanted to work in education but not teach Portable qualification

5.4.1 Active change to occupational context

A strong feature that emerged from 11 of the participants' accounts was their need to change their occupational role and organisational context, from a gatekeeping or managing role, to one that enabled others to make effective key life choices, rather than select, judge, even control and punish (in the case of Job Centre Plus staff) clients. In this way, careers guidance was viewed as more consistent with, and matched to, these participants' existing and/or developing values (Super, 1963). Participant A, who worked in a NCS setting, indicated that she had been working in human resources, but had been 'looking for a career change, utilising my skills and acquiring new ones, I mean I enjoyed the helping aspects of my previous role more, I wanted to focus on these positive aspects more' (the participant stressed the underlined word). She also expressed the view that, when researching career options for a possible move away from HR, careers guidance seemed 'more solid, more concrete, a profession' as compared to others, e.g. career coaching, which appeared 'watery, not as concrete, not as solid.' This experience was echoed by Participant B who works in an HE service: 'I was idealistic and wanted to be happy in the workplace. I moved into HR but it was not what I expected, too management...I was interested more in working with individuals not for serving company objectives.' Both participants here emphasised the positive connotations of helping people, and saw careers guidance as fulfilling this; while HR had come to represent less positive, controlling and unhappy associations. It is also interesting to note in Participant B's account that she had been idealistic, but that HR, and meeting company objectives, had been disillusioning – a sense of treating people as the means rather than as the end in itself. Here, observing Charmaz's (2014) stress on a line by line, almost word by word analysis, the words 'idealistic' and 'happy', and the ways in which they were expressed ('I was idealistic...and I wanted to be happy in the workplace') indicate the participant's strength of feeling.

This construct of HR being managerialist, while careers guidance was focussed on clients, also featured in Participant E's narrative. She was working in FE after leaving her HR career to take the QCG. Her account offers a further dimension: that of someone who had reevaluated her goals and values after becoming a parent. As she said: 'I found my priorities and values had shifted, I had a bit of a change in my life goals. I was looking to give something back, rather than making loads of money.' A similar sense of re-evaluation also figured Participant F's account. She too had worked in HR, but in the financial sector, and had also re-appraised her life goals after the birth of her children. This active change in her occupational preferences indicated a shift towards careers guidance which, she felt, offered more intrinsic satisfaction, as she expressed it: 'I liked the idea of helping people, to help them move forward, like when I first came to the course (the QCG), I had the view of, I can help people now.'

In moving from the Job Centre into a NCS setting, Participant H also articulated her dissatisfaction, even disillusion, with the managerialism and target-centred services of her previous work: 'After twenty-one years in DSS-type roles, at that point I had felt it had become too much about targets.' As with the participants above, she felt she needed to change her occupation to fit her values, and, indeed, felt able to exercise her agency to find work that was more fitting. This need to become more genuine in their work by moving away from roles that had left the participants feeling inauthentic was a key emergent axial during my data analysis: a sense that, ontologically, the precise circumstances of their previous roles had become constraining and inconsistent with their internal value base, their internal reality, if I can express it that way. Careers guidance was thus perceived and constructed as offering more client-centred, more value-congruent work in contrast to other, gate-keeping roles and structures that seemed to deny the intrinsic worth of individuals.

To extend this idea of helping and giving back, some of the participants expressed a clear desire to help particular types of client, and often those who may be perceived as hard to help, or who may be portrayed as problematic, especially in the popular press, e.g. young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Simmons and Thompson, 2011). Participants L, M, P and R, who worked in school settings, expressed a strong desire to ‘help young people’, while Participant G wanted to support those who were NEET and disaffected. Participant H was very interested in helping adults with very particular needs and challenges (although being more precise in this may compromise the participant’s anonymity). An interesting dimension of this concern to help young people, was expressed by Participant L, who noted a disenchantment with a previous role that could often ‘push young people through the system’; and so careers guidance offered ‘something that was supporting young people on a more personal level in more one to one work.’ Participant P expressed a proud sense of working with young people in a school setting despite the ‘negative press schools and young people get...I love it...I love the environment.’ Again, an interesting set of constructs emerges here: negative views, stigmatised clients, lower status work versus passion for helping a certain client, expression of ethical values that are contrary to those of earning money; with careers guidance appearing to represent the latter, too.

5.4.2 Influence of encounters with careers guidance staff

Six of the sample attested to the positive influence of encounters with careers guidance staff: interestingly, four of them had been working in roles such as learning assistants. The positive and indeed inspirational role model offered by such practitioners is in contrast to the apparently negative view of the profession discussed in chapter two. The following data support this view.

Before becoming a careers guidance practitioner with disadvantaged young people, Participant G had been working in an educational unit and had liaised with Connexions staff. What was notable in her account was the notion of career as a calling, as she described the impact of working with such staff: 'I thought, Oh hello, oh, that sounds interesting...for me, it was more professional, had more scope' – a kind of instant recognition of what she felt she should be doing instead of her learning assistant role. What I found very interesting in her narrative was her career progress: from a series of jobs after she had left school that she had found interesting, but only 'good enough'; to a careers guidance occupation that she felt validated her beliefs in working with disadvantaged young people. In addition, she believed the role had afforded her a sense of status and prestige that she had lacked previously.

Participant L had worked as a teacher, and after retiring she wanted to return to a role that involved helping and supporting young people. In common with the participants' motivations discussed above, she wanted to avoid a role that was stifled by managerialist targets – in her words, she was seeking a move into 'something that was supporting young people on a more professional level, in more one-to-one work.' Initially, she took on administrative roles with the Connexions service, but was then encouraged by service managers to become a Connexions Personal Adviser. In her view, 'Connexions sounded like a good service, with all the links to the other agencies.' The service upheavals in the wake of the Education Act (2011) presented her with a further opportunity: to negotiate a careers guidance role with the school where she had worked as a Personal Adviser. Again, this journey shows the extent to which the participant was able to exercise her agency, and create a new path for herself as a result of operating within a changing service structure. It also demonstrates the positive effect of management support which encouraged her to aspire to a new role: a different expression of managerialism here.

This journey for those in school-based careers guidance roles after working in Connexions was also mirrored in the narratives of Participants M and P. As with Participant L, both had worked in the service as administrators before also being encouraged to apply for the Personal Adviser role. And like Participant L, both were very keen to work with young people – a sense of calling that also featured in Participant G’s account. These stories cast a different light on the apparent structural failure of Connexions, as discussed in chapter two. For three of the participants, the precise and more specific aspects of their career trajectory – from administration to higher status roles - show how the service in which they operated enabled them to exercise choice and agency. In addition, the service’s demise did not then prevent them securing careers guidance roles in schools – roles that allowed them to pursue their career values of supporting young people with their life choices. As Participant P said of her work: ‘I am in the right place...I love the work and I love the environment.’

5.4.3 Initial career choice

Whilst only two of the participants indicated that they had chosen to enter the profession as their first career choice, their accounts are worth considering, since they reflect some of the historical features of the profession discussed in chapter two, as well as very rich accounts of how their careers have developed within the sector over considerable periods of time.

Participant K was very experienced, having gained the DipCG, and then worked in local authority-based careers services until her final move to an FE college. At the time of the research, she was contemplating retirement in a couple of years. Her account showed aspects in common with the above participants. She was very committed to client-centred work, and had remained constantly fascinated by ‘every person that comes through the door, every wee story you hear’ – a fascination apparently undimmed by over thirty years of

guidance work. In addition, she spoke in quite wry terms of all the policy and organisational changes she had seen and how, in her view, she had ‘resisted going into management...though I really enjoyed being a regional training co-ordinator, helping all the new blood to come through, that was a great time, when we had the money to develop people.’ This aspect of her account – of supporting new trainees – was particularly fascinating, since the impact of recent policy developments as discussed in chapter two means that there is no longer any workforce development strategy in England for the profession. In addition, she was also very committed to supporting young people: in fact, one of her reasons for entering the profession was to work with this group.

Participant N, while not quite as experienced, had over twenty years’ experience, beginning her career in school careers work, before moving into HE, and then into her current role as self-employed adult guidance worker. She most often worked with adults in organisational settings who were experiencing the threat of redundancy, or restructuring. Her entry in careers guidance also echoed those participants who spoke of the robustness and firmness of the profession, and its training routes:

‘I went into careers because it had an established and clear training route, which I needed when I graduated, and also I wanted to help people and make a difference, you know, not just go into a career to make money.’

A further common aspect here is the axial of the intrinsic rewards of helping people against simply making money. From her account, this urge to help people and make a difference has remained constant in her career development, as she moved through different roles, and into self-employment. Interestingly, she has pursued the latter in order to regain ‘some control, and do the things that I thought I had lost, management...I felt I had lost something when I moved into management, I’d just gone away from what I was best at, what

I had always wanted.’ She had held a management role in a HE service, but felt that the ‘managerial’ aspects, and seeing clients (and staff) more as a means of achieving targets, had left her dissatisfied and needing to get back to her original values.

The key points to emerge from the analysis above are the appeal of careers guidance, particularly in offering fulfilling, or more fulfilling, work that has the potential for transforming people’s lives. The latter was a particularly important motivation for those seeking a career change to one which matched their personal values: in short, careers guidance offered the research participants the opportunity to work in ways that were more aligned with such values and beliefs discussed above.

5.4.4 Role satisfactions and dissatisfactions

The next set of codes, presented in Table 2 below, offers further insights into the satisfactions (and dissatisfactions) expressed by the participants concerning their roles. These are important, since they indicate the ways in which the occupational values identified under the first code are expressed (or frustrated); and how this expression helps to confirm the emerging narrative of professional identity. The data to support these codes is organised into the specific operational contexts in which the practitioners work, e.g., schools, and HEIs. The advantage of doing this is to analyse the data at the ontic level (Stones, 2005), so that the precise details of such contexts are considered; commonalities in practices and values are identified; and how nuances and shifts in emphasis add to the development of my theory.

Table 2: Role satisfactions and dissatisfactions

Main Code	Sub-code	Axials
2. Job Satisfaction	2a) Expressing occupational values and skills when supporting and enabling client choice (n = 19: note all participants expressed this)	Exercising autonomy 'Being' client-centred Using in-depth interview skills 'Making a difference' to clients' career planning and lives
	2b) Occupational values supported by organisational or work context (n = 10: equal FE/HE split)	Collegiality Supportive, learning culture Constructive feedback Support for development (financial and 'moral')
3. Job dissatisfaction	3a) Challenge to occupational values by management practices (n = 2: NCS context)	From 'client-centredness' to 'targets' From 'support' to 'feedback by exception' From 'autonomy' to 'constraint'
	3b) Challenge to occupational values by nature of work (n = 3: 1 HE 2 NCS)	From 'variety' to 'routine and conveyor belt client work'

From the school-based practice, the views of Participant L, who had moved from teaching, then into Connexions, and then became a school-based careers adviser, were emblematic of those who worked in schools. When asked about what she enjoyed about her work, she answered thus:

'It is the one-to-one conversations, you know, it is challenging the youngsters to go outside of their comfort zone, their immediate perceptions maybe, opening horizons that they may not have thought about, and then seeing their progress through the system.'

The overarching feature of wanting to make a difference is thus extended by making a difference to young people in particular ways and at particular decision-points. Instead of simply confirming a pre-determined set of options and trajectories for learners, e.g., from

GSCEs, to A-levels or BTEC qualifications, and then university, L saw her role as one of expanding horizons, introducing options, and even lifting aspirations.

Further, the satisfaction she derived from the role was that these aims were possible because of the particular appeal of working with young people:

‘they’re not so set in their ways...they’re old enough to start forming a view of themselves in the round, and it’s seeing them develop over the two, three years, from a child to an adult, and I think that is very unfulfilling.’

Thus, Participant L saw her role as making a significant contribution to the developments of the learners as people, not just in terms of destination outcomes desired by the school. The chance to make a difference as the young people were developed, and expanding their horizons, was a major reward for her, as well as (I heard from her narrative) a particular privilege. The latter featured especially when she talked of the feedback she received from the students, both when working with them and when they returned having got a job or gone to university: ‘students are very appreciative, open and honest, and it’s lovely when they keep in touch.’

This additional dimension of the rewards – of developing and maintaining respectful, trusting relationships, and then seeing the positive impact of these – was also expressed by Participant M. Again, when asked about her job satisfaction, she identified the nature of the client first: ‘working with young people probably the most.’ When asked further what this meant more precisely, she was quite animated and passionate in her response: ‘when it comes down to it, it’s seeing people move on, when they come in, they are a different person when they leave, actually seeing them develop like that, it’s great.’ For these two participants in schools, the aim, and occupational value, of making a difference offers a context-specific

reward of seeing the impact their work on the young persons' overall development, not just in seeing the benefit of the careers guidance.

Further school context specific rewards were expressed by Participants P, Q and R, who had also moved into roles as school-based advisers after being employed by Connexions. In common with Participants L and M, but perhaps more readily, these three identified a particular satisfaction in the autonomy and sense of liberation in their work. Participant P's narrative here was particularly interesting, as she described her journey from being constrained in the 'monolith of Connexions', as she put it, into a role where she had a direct relationship with the young people in the school; and accountability to the organisation. This relationship, unmediated by a large employer, sharpened her understanding of autonomy: that being free wasn't just for personal satisfaction, but how it had 'focussed me back on the young people, being client centred, and ethical, and not being afraid to push for what I want from the school.' Pushing for what she wanted meant pushing impartial careers guidance, rather than being someone who steered young people into career outcomes that suitable for the school's targets. In this way, her account echoed Participant L's above: that the satisfaction from, and professional value of, autonomy, was deepened because it was there to enable her work with young people.

From the above analysis of the data from those who worked in schools, the following points are a summary of the satisfactions gained: autonomy; being client-centred; working with a particular client group; being embedded in a school so that the practitioners see the clients develop over time; and client feedback, also over time. The next section considers the data derived from the FE participants' responses, and identifies the similarities with the narratives considered in this section, as well as the additional dimensions that indicate the impact of the specific provider context.

Those participants who worked in the further education-based context also identified satisfactions that were similar to those who worked in schools, but also arose out the particular context. As a reminder, these practitioners usually work in a careers guidance team which is often located in a wider Student Services structure. As a result, teamwork also features as a satisfaction in the participants' accounts.

Participant E rattled off quite a list of satisfactions, most of which echoed those from school settings;

‘One to one guidance, erm, helping students to navigate the pathways open to them, and the biggest, the biggest satisfaction is when they come back and say, I’ve got this job or place at university or this apprenticeship as a result of the work we have done together.’

I have stressed the last part of this phrase as, when interviewing her, I felt the particular stress she placed on these words indicated another meaning. When I asked if this meant work she had completed with the students, she replied: ‘not just that. It’s work I have done with my colleagues, you know, how we discuss a lot, all the time, about students’ options, and how we should, erm, raise aspirations.’ This sense of collegiality is noted in the sub-category 2b in the above table: that the satisfaction of helping young people is not just derived from being client-centred, but also because the occupational value of close cooperation, not competition, with colleagues is part of the reward.

Participant F also spoke very fluently, and in similar ways about her satisfactions: ‘I love the one to one guidance, particularly moving people forward, and the feedback, I feel like I have I’ve changed, I’ve changed them.’ I could not help but notice the meaning that slipped here: that helping clients wasn’t just changing them, but also changing her: as if the

feedback that she also mentioned reinforced and developed her insights into, and satisfactions with, the job.

Both Participants E and F spoke about the collegiality they experienced in being part of an information, advice and guidance network, where sector developments, resources, and good practice were shared. Being connected to a community of practice will be discussed in relation to main code six, table 5 below. However, it is worth noting that the expression of an occupational value – that of sharing, and not competing – is consistent with client-centredness in its rejection of managerialism, and people used as a means to an end. In other words, the strong sense I had from these two narratives was that it would be unethical a) not to participate in a sharing network; and b) to try and profit as disconnected individuals or a service. The notion of a commitment to public service was thus a strong vocational tug.

This sense of seeing the clients develop, and knowing that the practitioner has made a difference, is also a satisfaction shared by those who work in schools and FE. Participant K's account also showed a particular commitment to client-centred work: that after thirty five years, she was still 'fascinated by everyone I meet...every wee story I meet, everyone who comes through the door.' This is an illustration of key traits and skills in careers guidance: the orientation to people, and their equal value and dignity; and the commitment to and skills of active listening, and putting aside any assumptions or pre-conceptions. What I heard in her account was the continuing delight in working with people in all their complexity, a delight that had not dimmed in her career.

This analysis shows is that the satisfaction derived from collegiality is an added dimension to those rewards held in common with the school-based participants. This feature is amplified by the HE participants' accounts as discussed below.

As with the two organisational settings discussed previously, the participants from HE also identified shared satisfactions, as well as those that were particular to their service context. The latter includes their involvement in both the development and delivery of employability programmes – a very important strategic consideration for all HEIs.

The satisfactions expressed by Participants B and C were consistent with those from schools and FE, e.g., as Participant B said: ‘I enjoy almost everything, erm, helping students and seeing, you know, seeing the outcomes of that and making a difference.’ Participant C answered very firmly and succinctly: ‘I like seeing students move forward.’ She also noted a feature perhaps more particular to HE: being involved in curriculum-based employability programmes. Participant C had been closely involved in devising a qualification aimed at graduates who were unemployed, or underemployed, and expressed her enjoyment of using her skills, creativity and (again) autonomy. Participant D’s sense of satisfaction was very similar: ‘very much the big sessions, the careers education ones’ and the sense she had of the ‘complete freedom to some extent of what you create.’ I noted the little qualifier of ‘to some extent’ – it may have been a little tic of speech, but for me it also captured a sense of working freely but within boundaries and structures. In this way, her institution’s employability strategy and targets had given her the context within which she could enjoy a sense of creative freedom. Having discussed the data from those participants from careers services in educational settings, the next section considers the narratives from those participants who work in adult guidance.

When considering the particular features of adult guidance (mainly NCS) delivery, most notably the need for practitioners to achieve often taxing targets, e.g., relating to the number of action plans that have to be completed, then it may be expected that job satisfaction may be less readily expressed. However, as I found for other participants, those from this setting (n=5) identified the fulfilments derived from their roles enthusiastically.

The aspects had strong commonalities with the other participants' narratives, whilst reflecting particular features of the NCS work, e.g., often working with clients from disadvantaged communities, or within prisons.

All of them identified a firm commitment to working with the client group, in all its diversity. As Participant A answered: 'I love the variety of it, love going into diverse environments, and, er, the huge variety of clients groups, it keeps you sharp.' This account has an echo with those who worked with young people and who also felt that their client group also kept them sharp. She also expressed the now common sense of satisfaction in having moved someone on: 'the feeling I have helped someone at the end of the day, and I've had quite a bit of success in getting people job outcomes.' This latter point is notable, since although potentially constrained by the performativity regime, her satisfaction is derived in getting the job for the client. Participant H spoke at some length about the appeal of working with a diverse client group: 'I enjoy the client group I work with and the wide range of ability, to help people...no two are the same, and it fascinates me, why people make the choices they do.'

Participant S added further dimensions to this appeal when she talked of her commitment to social justice. Her career route was fascinating: having moved into a managerial role in Connexions, her transfer to an NCS contract was accompanied by her choice to move back into advisory work. She felt a strong consistent theme in her work as a manager, and then an adviser, was her commitment to developing people: as she said, 'to leave them in a better state.' This commitment also extended to promoting social justice:

'I like working, I like working with people who face barriers, erm, and because I feel there was always enough support for those who were academically bright, not like the

middle band of people, I mean obviously, I say obviously, people who I identify with...it was making the difference between achieving and not achieving.’

Her satisfaction was in helping people to achieve their goals in spite of the barriers she felt they faced, particularly in relation to social class.

Participants T and U also echoed this commitment, and identified an obligation almost to working in a particular city, having grown up and continued to live and work there. As Participant T said: ‘I am a xxxx person, a xxxxx kid, I know a lot about this city’; and the sense of pride he expressed was in helping people from the area to make it and then ‘better’ was very evident in his narrative. The sense of making a city better by supporting and enabling clients’ choices was also evident in Participant U’s account:

‘Ultimately, I’m concerned about the welfare of people...I like empowering people, you know, I like the fact that...by giving them something at the end of the sessions, something they didn’t know at the start, then that’s a very empowering thing.’

In addition to the common features of making a difference, client centredness, and autonomy, the practitioners from this NCS setting added dimensions of dealing with a diverse client group, and also championing a particular area, especially one that had suffered from de-industrialisation.

The shared satisfactions, as well as those that were specific to service contexts, were expressed very readily by the participants. What was also less readily expressed was a sense of dissatisfaction. A pattern common to the responses was a pause after I had asked the question, as if the participants were really having to think of something to say. I found this surprising in the light of the rapid changes and the imposition of challenging performance indicators as discussed in chapter two. Only three in the sample overall expressed strong dissatisfactions with their role, with two coming from National Careers Service contexts.

They felt that the imposition of challenging targets compromised their desire to work in a client-centred way, and reduced their interaction to more of a routine, conveyor belt process, where the client became the means by which targets for action plans could be achieved (and thereby releasing funding), as Participant A found: ‘I suppose...I’m sure you’re not going to be surprised at this, but the targets.’ Participant H’s view was in agreement: ‘I least enjoy the contract (the service contract with targets), and the restrictions it gives to me, the lack of understanding of the client group I work with by my management team.’

However, in expressing her frustration, Participant A also offered a qualified, more nuanced understanding of the need for accountability: ‘I understand the need for them, the need for viability, some sort of measure, but they’re rigid, so rigid, that’s the frustration, they are so rigid.’ Her understanding also extended to an appreciation of the pressures that her service managers faced in enforcing the targets: that ‘they have no choice but to keep saying, six a day, six a day’ – the latter meaning six action plans per day. This sympathy for her managers was also indicative of an occupational value discussed in relation to categories 1 and 2: that is, an urge to understand and support people in the complex contexts they face. It indicated the ways in which her values and insights also mitigated the dissatisfaction with the structural and policy-driven aspects of her role.

The only other participant who expressed some dissatisfaction in her role was Participant D. Rather than feeling the constraints of strict, contractual targets, hers seemed more of an irritation with the routine nature of the shorter, more duty-style interviews, which could lead to ‘lots of students needing CV checks’. She expanded on this:

‘It’s not duty per se...the repetitiveness of duty, you can get bored of it, I get bored of it, so for example unprepared students turning up with a CV – is it a great use of my skills? It’s quite frustrating, you know, hit a button, go on a loop’

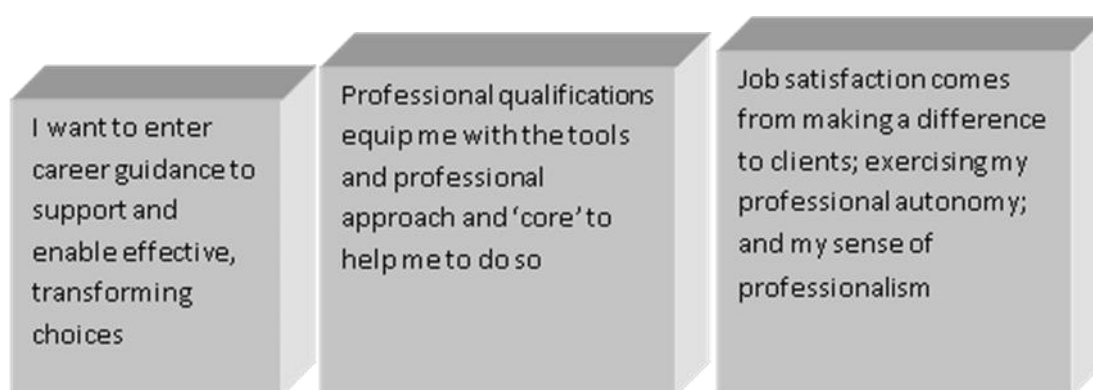
The quote expresses the sense that the advice she was giving was almost automatic, and didn't involve the autonomy and creativity she valued. However, in this instance, the participant had undertaken role diversification, while retaining one-to-one work as part of a greater variety of activities.

This section has presented my analysis in some detail the participants' motivations for entering the careers guidance work, the rich satisfactions that featured very evidently in the participants' narratives, and the relative lack of dissatisfactions. Whilst particular service contexts added specific dimensions, the rewards identified were common to all contexts, and spoke directly to the appeal of the profession as considered above in Category one. Following on from this phase of analysis, the next section will discuss the participants' perceptions of the foundations for their practice, identity and sense of professionalism. In particular, the main codes concern the role of qualifications in establishing these foundations, and the participants' understanding of the concepts concerning the profession, professionalism, and professional identity.

5.5 Careers guidance: foundations for professionalism; and definitions

As for table 2 above, the implications of the participants' organisational context for the meanings they derive are also examined. Before considering the data in detail, however, the following diagram show the crucial role that qualifications play in bridging entry to the profession and the satisfaction the participants derived:

Figure 1: The connections between motivation to enter the profession and job satisfaction:



The following discussions will exemplify the connections suggested by the figure above.

Table 3: Foundations for professionalism: the role of qualifications

Main Code	Sub-code	Axials
4. Professionalism: Foundations	4a) Underpinning qualifications (n = 17)	Promoting: Ethical codes not managerialism Client-centredness not targets Reflectiveness not procedures Theory to practice not unskilled work (Note these are common to those with QCG, NVQ 4 and QCFG 4)

5.5.1 The role of qualifications

As discussed in chapter two, one of the major impacts on careers guidance in school-based contexts by Connexions was the alleged dilution of entry requirements by the then

Labour government, and in particular the rigour of the qualifications such as the Diploma in Personal Adviser work and the NVQ 4 in Advice and Guidance (and note not careers advice and guidance) (Colley et al., 2010). However, the accounts of four of the five participants from schools did not support this more general view of such qualifications. Participant L who holds the pre-2006 NVQ 4, and had been a teacher, spoke of the qualification's strength in relation to developing her practitioner skills: 'I suppose, you know, the rigour of an interview, this is what you need to do, this is what you need to say.' Further, she spoke quite proudly of the commitment and work required by the qualification, something which she felt acted as an example to the young people she guides: 'I do have some enormous folders, and I show them to the students to explain to youngsters that you will still need a professional qualification, and you need to build a body of evidence.' The way in which she stressed 'professional qualification' and 'body of evidence' indicated not just her pride in her achievement, but also the metaphorical (and indeed physical) weight and credibility that the training added to her work.

Participant P shared this view, and added further dimensions to the sense of value placed on the NVQ 4. For her, the qualification was 'all about ethics, the client, being client-centred...and diversity, equal opportunities, and not just telling people what to do. It gave me confidence, you know, to work in a school, to say, look, I am a professional.' There is a lot of key points condensed into her (speedily-delivered) response. One strong aspect was the way in which the course promoted ethical and client-centred ways of working: in short, a foundation for her value-base as a practitioner. The second was the empowering concerns of careers guidance, not just in telling clients what to do. The third was the sense of professional esteem it gave, not just personally, but in relation to her organisational context, and in response to its challenges, e.g., to those from other professions, such as teaching, who

may regard careers guidance as less credible than their work. For Participant M, the NVQ was professionally and ontologically significant and vital to her development and practice.

It is worth noting that some of the historical and power issues discussed in chapter two did have some bearing on the responses from Participants M and R. Participant M was put through the Diploma in Personal Advice as part of the introduction of Connexions into her area – the emphasis being on the involuntary nature of the exercise – and she expressed her lack of connection with it thus: ‘No, not, not at all...it wasn’t really relevant at all, I didn’t take it too seriously, in fact, I didn’t think Connexions would last!’ Such was the experience that she has not pursued other qualifications since. However, being directly employed by the school, and having ‘fought for’ a more comprehensive, careers education programme in the school, she was at the time of the data collection much more interested in pursuing a higher level qualification because it would be much more relevant to her work. Participant R offered an interesting contingent, nuanced and almost wily view about the shifting nature of policy-driven qualification changes. She noted:

‘I was very glad I did the DipCG, it gave me a lot more depth, more skills, more understanding...I did the NVQ4 when we shifted over to Connexions, everyone who had the DipCG had to, we had no choice...I mean it was OK, I did it, I got it out of the way, but...no, the NVQ4 is not what careers guidance is about.’

What is notable about this view is the ways in which a contingent approach – ‘we had no choice’ – was driven by her commitment to providing help to young people. In other words, the participant recognised that the price of remaining in advice work was following organisational dictums. At the same time, the depth, skills and understanding of her DipCG allowed her to offer client-centred services that were predicated on careers guidance, and not simply telling and advising along pre-set, Connexions lines. The sophistication of her

position was deepened when she indicated later in her narrative that she was part of a local network with guidance practitioners, most of whom held the NVQ 4. In this way, her personal view of this qualification did not appear to prevent her from participating and sharing in a community of practice. Again, I was struck by the way in which participants were able to reconcile principles with tactical nous, based on respect for other practitioners and an understanding of how to work within constraints.

The participants from further education-based contexts were more mixed in the qualifications they held: two held the QCG, gained within five years of the research interview; one held the NVQ 4 (pre-2006 version); and the final one had held the DipCG for over three decades. Participants E and F were fulsome in their praise for the importance of the QCG for their work, as indicated by the former: ‘A lot, it underpins everything in terms of my interview delivery....I always think about what I want to achieve, in terms of styles...it also really underpins my guidance.’ Here, the participant was clear that the qualification had developed her guidance philosophy, as well as her practical skills.

What is notable about Participant J’s view of her NVQ 4 is that it echoes the previous account:

‘Well I guess I might have got an idea about...you understand the standards you need to achieve and that’s what it does give you, more of an underpinning, maybe a reflection...how the reflection is really important to help me understand my role a bit more.’

What adds to significance of her verdict is that, later in the interview, she relayed how her NVQ 4 had been ‘rushed through’ and that ‘I didn’t really understand what I was doing at first, we were just told to do it quickly, we needed to for the organisation.’ As a result, she felt ‘less qualified than those with the QCG...you can just tell, there is more of a core, a

confidence...but I do find the NVQ 4 useful, still, even though.’ That her initially expressed view of her qualification was positive, and similar to those who hold the QCG, shows the ways in which she had applied and then made sense of the value of the NVQ 4 despite the apparently superficial way in which she was taken through the programme.

Participant K’s story also captures some of the historical developments in careers guidance, and its changing qualification structure. Perhaps the experience of being encouraged to look back at the experience of gaining the DipCG provoked wry amusement: ‘My course was unique – it was an in-service course for civil servants.’ This reflected the odd split caused by the fact that, while most LEAs in England ran with the new Youth Employment Service (as discussed in chapter two), not all did, leaving central government to pick up the service and the training. That said, the positive and collegial experience was still readily recalled: ‘What was really good was the rest of the students, they had a lot of knowledge and really drove the course.’ The sense of having been empowered to help drive the course appeared very formative for her.

All the participants from the higher education-based setting (n=3) held the QCG and had acquired it within five years of the research interview. The organisational context reflects a preference for higher level careers guidance qualifications (or substantial graduate recruitment experience). However, the accounts were not totally unanimous in their view of the value of a professional qualification to their practice. When asked about her view of the QCG, Participant B spoke very strongly: ‘I wish I could do it all again! The theory seemed a lot at the time, but now I can see the practical applications. The Egan one was the simplest to remember.’ Interestingly, she couldn’t readily identify a career choice theory; but remembered an interview model the most easily. Participant C was also ready with her response:

‘It’s all about client-centredness, helping clients, being aware of your values...that’s what the qualification gave me. Oh, and something, like, it all fitted together, I understood what I’d been doing in my work before.’

She was clear that the qualification had developed her skills, insights and understanding of her practice before she undertook the QCG. Once again, the aspect that was recalled most readily was the ethical framework that the learning had developed: that any theories or models were there to help the client.

By contrast, Participant D took a very instrumental, context specific view of the value of the qualification. When I asked if the qualification had helped her, she replied:

‘probably not, if I am honest...I’ve not used much of what I have learnt, the reason being that the nature of the queries are very different to what were trained to do on the QCG, we don’t get many coming in that requires pure guidance.’

This individual had also expressed dissatisfaction with the routine, conveyor-belt, CV-focused nature of her client interaction. She had not found the qualification practically useful, and was some distance from the realities of service delivery. Her account was a useful indicator of the need for my research to pay attention to these contrasting views, since they were helpful in testing the emergence of my theory.

The five participants the adult-guidance-based practice held a variety of qualifications: two had the QCG; two with the DipCG; while one held the level 6 award. Those with the QCG had gained this qualification within ten years of the interviews, while the individual with the level 6 had recently acquired it. The DipCG graduates had very interesting narratives, in that they had acquired the qualification some decades previously, but both were still clear about the importance of the qualification to them.

For Participant A, she had gained the QCG in order to move into careers guidance work. It is perhaps not surprising that she was very clear about the way in which the qualification underpinned her work: ‘The course wasn’t long enough, it was really interesting, really loved the subject matter and the practical aspects solidified it. It forms a foundation for the daily basis of my work.’ The importance of the ethical core it helped her develop was also readily expressed: ‘The codes of ethics it covered, they are so fundamental, ethics are such an important thing, that you are treating people professionally. It’s really easy to forget that when funded by challenging targets.’ Participant U, who had gained the QCG more recently, but after being in a careers guidance role for over twelve years, chose instead to focus on the deeper skill levels that the qualification had given him: ‘Certainly LMI (labour market information) has been good, and just reflecting on that, interviewing, erm, I have certainly structured, in most cases, my interview techniques. I never used to think about interviewing...I used to just let it happen organically.’

Considering the answers of Participants N and T is interesting, since they offer contrasting entry and qualification routes. Participant N had moved into adult guidance with high level clients after a career spanning over twenty years that has covered school and then HE guidance, as well as management positions, and now working on a self-employed basis. She gained the DipCG twenty-one years previously, and offered an interesting perspective on the enduring value of the qualification: ‘Well, interestingly, I think...there are parts of the course that I draw on now, still, even though it was a long time ago, I’ve even gone back to my old notes!’ What is also interesting is that she was the only participant to attest to the value of career choice theories to her work:

‘They are much more relevant now than I was drawing on back then, much more around psychologically-based career theory, very much around decision-making

which I didn't use as much back then in the bread and butter, transitions work in schools and HE.'

The importance of the knowledge base to her work is in contrast to Participant T, who offered a very personal account of how he couldn't succeed academically because of his undiagnosed learning needs. The recent achievement of the level 6 qualification was, for him, 'a major milestone'; what he drew from the content was the 'importance of reflection' to his work, as he noted: 'and there are certain, you know, the Johns method especially, and I do like to reflect, to think on my feet, to help the client better.' What is common to both here is the ways in which multi-faceted qualifications can support and inform practitioners work in a variety of ways; but in response to clients' needs.

Overall for this main code, the overriding sense from the participants' narratives was the importance of their qualification in developing their sense of professionalism and identity, not least in ethical, client-centred practice. That they volunteered this more readily than being able to recall any particular theories (apart from one participant) is interesting. This may have been due to the ways in which their work had deepened the practical and ethical aspects of their training. At the same time, this feature of their narratives is also consistent with their motivation to enter the profession in the first place: the role that the qualification has played, and continues to play, in helping people and making a difference to their career development.

5.5.2 Views on defining the profession

The next set of data as presented in table four explores the extent to which the participants' perceptions of 'profession', 'professional' and 'professional identity' enhanced the development of my model of professional identity; and indeed whether the terms meant

anything to them. The consistency of the responses to the first two terms is revealing, since it amplifies the codes considered so far.

Table 4: Perceptions, and conceptions, of definitions

Code	Sub-code	Axials
5. Professionalism: definitions	5a) Profession (n = 19)	Defined as: Underpinned by qualifications Entry regulated by qualifications Professional body regulation of practice Society's recognition
	5b) Professional (n = 19)	Dimensions of: High standards of self-presentation not poor self-presentation Client-centred and ethical not managerial Expert knowledge not lack of professional value
	5c) Professional Identity	Most problematic to define with no emerging common dimensions

During the process of analysis, the data from which the sub-categories above emerged became increasingly pertinent for a number of reasons. The first aspect was the strength of feeling expressed by the participants when discussing their perceptions of what a profession, and being professional, meant. More crucially, and in relation to the main theoretical perspective I have adopted, their narratives indicated the existing knowledge of what a profession, and being professional means: knowledge that they are carrying with them, and indeed bringing to their work and everyday practices. Further, the nuances in their accounts once again indicated both their knowledgeability, both in terms of broader concepts and specific contexts, as well as they ways in which they create meaning that arises out of their experience and day-to-day practices.

As with the previous two tables, I have grouped the responses by organisational context, to show the ways in which responses may reflect the latter, as well as sharing commonalities.

In response to the question of what constituted a profession, those from school-based contexts reflected issues of esteem and status; qualifications; and a role with credibility.

Participant L – who had pointed out to her clients the value of professional qualifications to their future development – focussed on matters of status and the role of higher level qualifications in defining a profession: ‘Erm, a high level career, something without doubt that would expect a degree or higher level qualification.’ Participant M shared this view to some extent, although her answer may reflect in part that she holds the DPA: ‘I tend to think...of somebody who has been to university, has done a degree, like a doctor, or accountant, or a nurse...though I personally don’t always agree with that view.’ Participants Q and R’s views also covered the idea of holding higher level qualifications, or a job that requires these, as well as the idea that ‘a professional career has a higher level of learning and entry qualifications.’ (Participant R). Participant S – who at the time of the research interview had thirty-six years’ experience in the profession, and held the DipCG – answered in a way that probably reflected her own commitment to her role: ‘Being dedicated to your specific area of expertise.’ The latter words are interesting: that as well as requiring expertise, a profession also demands dedication to it. This echoes the idea of career as vocation discussed in chapter two: almost that a person is called to service, and should commit to it as a way of being.

Those from further education-based settings expressed views similar to the responses above, but some interesting variations that added to the nuanced view of what a profession means. Participant E, who had actively changed her occupation from HR to careers guidance, was very clear about questions of identity were implicated in notions of the

profession: ‘For me, a career means that profession, the job we identify as ours, like, erm...I identify myself as a career guidance practitioner.’ This view links to that expressed by participant S above – that idea of being, and then dedicating yourself to the profession. This, more corporeal idea was reflected in Participant F’s answer: ‘A profession means you are attached to a body, so my thought would be, you are a doctor, or a lawyer, or a nurse, erm...and you are attached to a body like the NMC.’ Her answer also extends the idea of identifying with the concept of the profession – that the latter is also signified by a professional body, and that professions should be part of and attached to it.

Participant J summarised these personal and embodied aspects: ‘Profession, erm...I guess profession means....it sort of means your job, I guess to me it’s what you’ve trained in, erm, and what you are working as...in a way...so you understand your profession.’ The latter phrase was remarkable, in that the concept of profession is not an abstract one, but one that a practitioner understands. Again, this point is consistent with the contentions of my theoretical perspective: that agents are able to grasp relatively general concepts, like profession in this case, and understand them in relation to their training, practice, identity, and sense of being part of a body.

Again, the responses from the higher education-based participants reflect the ideas discussed above, but in addition some views on what jobs would be considered professions, and which would not. Participant B’s answer reflected the blurring of identity and also esteem and status: ‘Just in simple terms, equivalent to your job, er, someone can be a lawyer, a doctor...it is someone who requires a higher level, a higher level professional qualification to do a job.’ When asked if a cleaner, or an electrician, could be called being part of a profession, she answered: ‘Maybe not.’ For her, the expertise and qualifications needed to be allied to questions of status. Participant C’s forthright and immediate answer zoomed in on the idea of identity and immediately identifiable qualities: ‘A career that has an identity: you

instantly know what it is, er, about its purpose.’ This response reflected, in part, the very confident but also very secure sense that she expressed the importance of her role in relation to the organisation’s employability focus. The notion of commitment, and to a vocation, as noted by participant S above, was also noted by participant D: ‘For me, a profession is in simple terms, a profession is the career that a person is committed to...that is, I have made a commitment.’ Again, this is an interesting way of defining a profession, and distinguishing it from a job: that to enter the former, a person needs to commitment themselves, not just in terms of acquiring the higher level qualifications, but in the sense of becoming part of it.

Once again, the participants from adult guidance-based settings expressed their views in terms of required higher level qualifications, status and esteem, but also more in-depth ideas that debated the notion of traditional versus newer professions. Participant A answered in terms of the effects of the development of professional traits in chapter two: ‘Not just your traditional doctors, lawyers, I mean, there have been lots of changes in the education system, so...degrees, professional bodies, professional standing, these are important to a profession.’ This more sophisticated sense of profession in more current contexts was also reflected in participant U’s answer. Having come through a banking and insurance route, his idea of a profession was ‘that it involves a higher qualified status for, like, solicitors, bank managers, banking people, I suppose more as we would term white collar work. People involved in the civil services, so a profession wouldn’t merely be a trade.’

Further, participant T’s ideas moved from those shared by others’ accounts, to notions of equality and diversity, and also a sense almost of resentment at the class associations implicated in the idea of a profession: ‘I think ultimately for me it’s belonging to, ah, an organisation or, erm, a group of individuals who have studied, have worked and are regarded as experts in the particular field.’ His response then shifted, and his facial expression also changed as he became less satisfied with what he just said:

‘These kinds of words are used to try and, erm, and maybe, erm, try and make people sound better than other people, because I regard someone who works in a factory to have a profession, yea? And because everyone has an important role to play.’

One aspect of these participants’ accounts that has been discussed when considering their satisfactions is the sense of commitment to a location: of addressing issues of social exclusion. This commitment was, in part, captured by these words.

Overall for the sub-code, the participants’ accounts reflected common views about the definition of a profession, such as the role of higher level qualifications in signifying its status, as well as insights into the ways in which society constructs certain roles as being of higher status than others. The next sub-code, ‘professional’, indicates the ways in which the participants demonstrate more nuanced understanding of how being professional is different from more abstract conceptions of ‘profession’. This notion of being is significant for the discussion of the data presented in table 5 below.

5.5.3 Views of defining ‘professional’

The idea of personal conduct and manner, as well as ethical standards figured strongly from the five participants from school-based practice. As Participant L answered: ‘You know, relating to professional conduct...you are doing this in a professional way, you know, it’s honest, it’s within the law, all these things.’ Participant M was keen to stress that the idea of being professional wasn’t limited to those from higher status professions: ‘More, that they are professional in the job they are undertaking, I mean, a dustbin man can be very professional.’ Participant Q sought to combine ideas of behaviour and ethics: ‘Ach, now that’s different (to profession) – it could be anyone working within boundaries, qualities, standards...the way you behave and talk...and the image, maybe, and the element of trust of clients and colleagues.’ Her response covered a number of very interesting aspects very

quickly: that being professional meant working within standards and boundaries, and that trust was a key element for her. A further element in the response was image: that the practitioner needed to appear trustworthy and professional in order to help develop clients' regard for the service.

Ideas of conduct and personal appearance also featured as dimensions in these participants' accounts from the further education context. Participants E and F were very clear about behaving correctly: 'It's how I conduct myself' (E) and 'It's how you choose to behave, even if you are working as a cleaner, which, um, is a vital job, but you know what I mean.' Again, the responses demonstrated in-depth insights and powerful concepts, as shown by Participant K: 'It's how you, it's about your integrity and professional manner.' For the latter, the idea of manner proceeding from, and indicating, integrity (or trustworthiness) links back to the discussions concerning motivation for wanting to enter the profession: to become more authentic in work that integrates personal values and professional skills to make a difference to clients. As Participant E noted: 'It's not just about conducting yourself properly in a business meeting or something.'

For Participant B, being business-like was an important indicator of professionalism in HE-based settings: 'OK, someone behaving in a business-like way, dressing up smartly, being professional kind of appearance.' This response reflects in part the HE setting – particularly when working with particular academic departments where business-like appearance are important for credibility – and, to a certain extent, what the participant has carried with her from her previous HR, more corporate role. Whilst she had rejected the managerialism of her previous role, she was still carrying some of the aspects of this into careers guidance. By contrast, Participant C emphasised the client-centred aspects of being professional: 'I am thinking about codes, and the ethical elements of the job, erm...doing your best for the student...whereas unprofessional would be breaking confidences, and

influencing people in the wrong direction.’ In other words, breaking the ethical codes, and particularly trustworthiness. Participant D returned back to her concern for training and commitment: ‘I go back to being a doctor, or a lawyer, or even a cleaner...probably the doctor is more professional...because of the greater commitment to their training.’ These responses, whilst consistent with those from schools and FE, also reflected some of the organisational issues: the need to appear business-like; and perhaps to demonstrate a commitment to becoming qualified that is equal to those from academia. ‘Being professional’ in these ways is thus a key tactic when seeking to negotiate with academic staff for access to the curriculum, in order to promote employability.

In defining what may be meant by ‘professional’, those from the adult guidance and NCS settings specifically also identified elements of conduct and ethical standards, as participant A noted: ‘You can be very professional but not part of a profession...it’s how you behave, present yourself, and how you interact with your customers and client, having their best interests at heart.’ This way of behaving but in a client-centred way was shared by participant U: ‘Professional is for me, erm, doing my job, doing my job well, and adhering to the ethics, like the CDI, etc, etc.’. Participant N’s account extends these considerations, and is interesting because she is now working on a self-employed basis: ‘I would like to be considered professional if I...mmmm...delivering the service, the contract, the work I have agreed to deliver to the client and to the standard we have agreed.’ Her work, however, is not simply driven by what a client specifies in the contract: ‘So I would deliver it (the contract) to the best of my ability, erm, to, you know, abide by the principles of my profession.’ She was very clear that these principles are impartiality, confidentiality, and promoting clients’ decision-making skills – again, linking back to the reasons for entering the profession discussed in relation to category one.

5.5.4 Defining professional identity

Finally for this sub-code, most of the participants were more hesitant when asked to define what ‘professional identity’ meant to them. Most of the responses seemed to circle back to aspects they had highlighted when discussing the terms ‘profession’ and ‘professional’; or jumped ahead in the interview schedule, so to speak, by expressing their sense of professional identity. The following quotes from Participants B, C, F, G, L, and U respectively capture some of the ways in which the participants tried to tackle the term:

‘If you feel you are part of a wider community of professionals, so for example, someone who is a doctor, or medical...’

‘Knowing your discipline, and what makes you...what makes you...makes you, erm,...instantly knowing what the area is about, its vision and purpose’

‘I suppose as a careers adviser are we accepted by others, er...would you look at a careers adviser the same way as a teacher and I suspect not...’

‘Personally, to me, it doesn’t mean anything, I’m a person who does a role, interestingly enough, Social Work, after care workers, there’s a bit of snobbery with Social Work...’

‘Professional identity is more about how you feel about your profession and your career...how you see your profession and how it relates to other professional areas’

‘Well, for me, er, professional identity is being eroded by this (xxx) government (laughs)...so for me it’s about, it’s about, it can be like, er, a trade

union, I 'spose, a professional group, being part of something that stands up for people, gives everyone a fair chance, being impartial'

Some strands emerge here which are similar to those teased out in the other categories. Firstly, the idea of careers guidance and its professional identity or standing in relation to other professions. Then, the notion of profession and professional identity and how it may seem snobbish or self-protective. Thirdly, professional identity being an organising concept that may help individuals make sense of their career and profession, and in relation to other occupational areas (perhaps meaning 'I am this and not that', or 'I am this and similar to that but different also'). Finally, the idea of the ways in which policies have eroded the profession and made practitioners much more defined by performance targets or renaming of roles, e.g. employability.

The apparent lack of a commonly expressed definition of professional identity could have undermined the emerging theory: that the identity of careers guidance practitioners rests on the elements of client-centredness, helping others, ethical practice, and professional expertise. However, the consistency of the participants' narratives and answers in most of their responses suggested that it was the term 'professional identity', rather than the lack of having or feeling one, that caused the participants the most challenge. My point here is supported and amplified by the following main code: that of 'making meanings'.

5.6 Careers guidance: making meanings

So far, the data presented in the tables 1 to 4 above have explored participants' motivations for entering the profession; the satisfactions they derive from their role; the central importance of their qualifications to their sense of identity and role purpose; and their insights into the concepts of the profession and being professional. The data discussed in relation to table 5 below builds on the main codes presented so far to explore the precise and also shared meanings that the participants' derive from their practice within their organisational context.

Table 5: Careers guidance: making meanings

Main code	Sub-codes	Axials
6. Professionalism: making meanings	6a) Belonging to a profession (n = 16 positive responses; n = 3 equivocal)	Positive responses centre on the skills and qualifications that are needed to enter and practice Equivocal reflect the following: Impact of sector changes, e.g. Connexions (n = 1: FE very experienced.) Nature of role (n = 1 in Looked After Children work) Profession still in a state of development (n = 1: FE about to leave for another role)
	6b) Having a professional Identity (n = 18 positive responses so far; n = 1 negative)	Negative response is someone who is moving into a different role
	6c) Positive impact of organisation on professional identity	Links to 6b) above
	6d) Negative impact of organisation on professional identity	Links to 6a) above

	6e) Participation in guidance community: Yes overall (n = 15) 6ei) Only with own colleagues (n = 2: 1 NCS and 1 HE) 6eii) With local and regional networks (n = 10; 5 from schools; 3 from FE; 1 from HE; 1 from self-employed) 6eiii) Through professional body (n = 2) HE with AGCAS 6eiv) Through other professional networks (n = 1 self-employed)	Sharing knowledge and expertise Developing sense of commonality with other practitioners
	6f) No sense of participation in community (n = 4: 1 HE; 1 NCS; 1 FE; 1 schools/targeted support)	Impact of sectoral change with Connexions (n = 1: FE very experienced) Sense of competition with other colleague due to targets (n = 1: NCS) Other services not as well developed (n = 1 HE role change to manager) In too specialised a role (n = 1 who works with NEETs)

The participants' accounts from which this main code, and its associated sub-codes were generated, were particularly interesting, because they developed further the picture of knowledgeable practitioners who were aware of their agency and personal history. That is, whilst they were all-too aware of governments' view and esteem of careers guidance, their largely positive sense of their identity, and the value of the profession, were very prominent. For example, all but one of the participants spoke very positively, and without hesitation, when asked if they have a professional identity; sixteen of the nineteen were also very positive about careers guidance being a profession. Of the three who were less so, only one spoke out against the effects of managerialism discussed in chapter two. The variability of their membership of, and engagement with, communities of practice, was less a concern in relation to the generation of my theory. The local arrangements (that particularly those from

schools identified) showed their ability to create support systems despite service cuts, and which drew on their personal and historical sense of how to support colleagues. Again, only one participant identified a sense of isolation that was not shared by those from the same service context. What was of concern was the relative lack of engagement and sense of connection with a professional body. The implications of this issue are discussed in my conclusions.

The data below consider the responses in relation to each sub-code; and also by organisational setting.

5.6.1 Careers guidance as a profession; and a sense of professional identity

All of the participants from school-based practice (n=5) believed strongly that careers guidance is a profession; and each felt they had a professional identity. There were some particularly rich accounts of what they felt these convictions – and they were expressed as such – stood out.

Participant Q's account began equivocally, however. She felt it was an 'uphill struggle' to keep pressing the case that careers guidance is a profession; in her view, teachers 'sometimes think I don't have one (a professional identity)...sometimes careers advisers are seen as dispensable.' Having expressed that, she was then very clear that she does have a professional identity, and was very clear on what she felt this rested on:

'Gosh, one thing they do notice, the teachers do, is, gosh, you know a lot of people, employers, you have a lot of contacts. Teachers haven't got time to build up employer contacts, and you know, if I left, what would happen to all that? They'd miss me then!'

What was being signalled here was her sense of expertise – employer contacts, and labour market information (LMI) – that teachers didn't have, and how this knowledge made her equal to them.

This sense of possessing LMI expertise and knowledge that both distinguished her expertise from teachers, and made her feel on a level with them, was shared by participant Q. She was also about what her sense of identity and worth rested on: 'I have a good knowledge of options for young people...and by giving, offering impartiality, to empower choice for young people, you know...that's what I have.' Not only is her LMI expertise, and comprehensive overview of options, important to bolster her organisational value, it also helps to empower clients. In this sense, she is presenting and translating careers information and LMI for young people so that they can use them, and feel empowered in their choices. Participant L's view was similar, and expressed very passionately:

'You have to have that body of knowledge, you have to have that willingness to keep yourself up to date...the information and the expertise you are giving to the teaching staff, to parents, and everyone else, must be of the highest level, and that to me is a profession, that to me is being professional.'

As a result of her very clear and unequivocal sense of her stock in trade, she added: 'I am equal in staff meetings, when I research and present LMI they don't know, my input is seen as very important to the school.' Here, she is also capturing a very important dimension: that in being client-centred first, this is not exclusive of adding value to, and being accountable to, the host organisation. Her sense is also predicated on an acute understanding of how to be and operate within a particular organisational setting: essentially, how to be credible, respected and trusted.

Further still, Participant P presented a variation on the powerful views above that shows the ways in which a sense of one's profession, and professional identity, can be embodied. As a result of working in a school, but on a self-employed basis, after working under the umbrella of Connexions, she faced the challenge of who she was, professionally; and how to present herself, particularly during the contract negotiations. As she acutely put it: 'I've become more conscious...I've had to re-brand myself, um, and relaunch myself, you know, and have a business card (laughs) which is mine, that is me, you know.' She described the act of designing her own business card as emblematic of the growth she experienced when leaving Connexions: 'I have to be me, my brand, not hide behind a big organisation anymore. I have to be clear about me, and what I stand for, you know, for the clients, with the school management.' The sense of standing on her own, and stating what she believed in, and why, meant that she felt brave enough to push for the ethical and business case for client-centred services. She was also very clear that the case was being made by her, not a large organisation. Again, this was a very powerful account of how the policy shifts discussed in chapter two have resulted for these participants from school backgrounds in strengthened professional identities of those who are clear about the value of themselves and the profession.

The view that careers guidance is a profession, despite wider perceptions to the contrary, was shared by the participants from further education-based settings. In addition, the particular expertise that the profession, and their professional identity, was founded on, was also strikingly similar. Participant E tackled the view that anyone can give careers advice, and that it doesn't require particular skills, training or an ethical approach:

'Everybody thinks they can give careers guidance, and everybody tries to, erm...proper careers guidance is completely impartial and independent, and so much

of careers 'guidance' is not, it's just people's perceptions of a job based on personal experience, it's just, you know, it's just too subjective.'

By contrast, she felt that careers guidance, delivered by those who have the higher level qualifications, and with the right ethical approach, can achieve much more for the client: 'Careers guidance can give the full picture of LMI...and full consideration of the person's circumstances, so that they can navigate the pathway...whereas unqualified people don't have the right information.' She commented with some pride, after battling to raise the profile of the service based on its expertise: 'Even (college) tutors now realise the value and expertise of what is being offered.' Once more, part of the participant's professionalism rested on her ability to navigate the organisation's systems and networks in order to promote the service, and its value to clients and the organisation.

Participant F shared the views above, even if her answer combined lots of different and very important aspects: 'Again, I'm going to come back to client-centredness, impartiality, erm...professionalism, subject knowledge, definitely subject knowledge, LMI, information, all that...CPD and being part of a network.' She was very definite about the importance of specialist subject knowledge to the esteem of the profession, and her urge to make a difference to others. She too recognised the need to promote the service's value and professionalism; that it was not enough to advertise the service to clients given the organisational climate in which she worked.

Participant J was more equivocal in her reflections on careers guidance as a profession, and her sense of professional identity. However, her account was quite balanced and nuanced; and reflected the need for researchers to attend to the particular circumstances and events that have helped to shape her views. For instance, she recognised that careers guidance could and should be viewed as a profession: 'I think if someone says, I'm a careers

adviser, then you know, they've been trained for it, that the job they are doing.' As aspects of her account have shown in other sections, she felt that the manner of her training, that is, organisationally contingent and rather rushed in order to hit targets, affected the value she has placed on her expertise. Her views, too, reflected the sense that she was at a career crossroads:

'Also, for me...I've, I've just done a job, you know? And I am not sure it is something I want to do anymore. I mean, I do enjoy it, I wish I was more...looking at colleagues who have higher level qualifications, and their beliefs...but it's not been my career.'

She did indicate that she still wanted to help young people, and would move more towards educational support. The rather wistful sound in her voice made me reflect on whether she felt that her career might have developed differently had the circumstances of her initial role as a Connexions Personal Adviser been different.

In the participants' accounts from HEI-based settings (n=3), there was a much stronger sense that they were members of a profession, and with a stronger identity, in relation to other roles in the services that were 'just' concerned with information and advice. As Participant B relayed: 'Yes, yes, I do think careers guidance is a profession, for all the reasons I have said before...job title, tasks, roles, and going into the careers profession after doing the QCG.' She made quite a sharp distinction between her professional role, and that of an employment adviser who 'only give information...I mean, anyone can give advice, whereas careers guidance is important, is aimed at, you know, it's for the individual.' She felt that how her developed grasp of the information and the LMI base, delivered within the context of guidance, not just 'telling people what to do makes me a lot more professional.' Participant C expressed very similar views: 'People who are just employability advisers, you

know, in academic departments especially, they just don't see the whole picture, they can only go so far, they fail to explore, they only take people on the surface.'

The two accounts here also reflect some of the realpolitik of HEIs, where academic departments have parallel (and possibly competing) employability services. However, what also emerged here, and which is strongly implicit in others' views, is that careers guidance can only be properly effective if clients are enabled to make the best use of the information available to them. As Participant A said, she felt that career coaching was 'weak and watery' because, in her view, it did not help clients to engage with more concrete opportunity structures, and to explore what was possible, rather than what was merely wished for. At the same time, using information to simply tell people what to do without a proper understanding of the person (which is what careers guidance can promote) was not seen as professional or ethical. The participants' pride in their profession, and identity, have been (perhaps rightly) somewhat challenged by organisations' attempts to provide services on the basis that anyone can give information and advice without proper training. This is a thread common to those from schools and FE. Thus, the sense of identity is bound up with a need to promote their expertise, but also with the need to challenge assumptions made about the lack of any special knowledge and qualifications needed for careers guidance.

These strong aspects of the knowledge base for the profession, and how this generates professional identity and pride, also figured in the adult guidance-based participants' answers. Participant A added a further dimension: that of how expertise also develops professional credibility, particularly when dealing with clients who were experienced and expert themselves: 'Establishing professional credibility is really important, especially when dealing with clients who are skilled people – you really need to know your LMI, um, really know your stuff, and you cannot waffle.' This also links to a strong feature of the CDI's

ethical codes: the need to maintain and develop knowledge and expertise in order to help clients more effectively.

Two contrasting accounts offer additional valuable dimensions and deeper insights into questions of professional identity, and the esteem of the profession. Participant H's account was perhaps emblematic of the dilemma faced by practitioners in very target-driven roles: 'I personally feel I have a professional identity...I feel the people I work for, they don't get it, and they're destroying people's confidence in our role.' Here, the view was that the attack on her role, and careers guidance, wasn't based on debates concerning esteem; in the participants' opinion, it has been the relentless focus on achieving targets to the exclusion of all else. This aspect of her role – meeting targets – was inescapable. There was a very clear sense from her account that, were it not for the rapport and reinforcement evident in her client feedback, then her role would have been difficult to sustain. That said, she still conveyed a sense of professional identity; and indeed it was 'the managers who don't understand' who posed the most threat (in her view) to the esteem of careers guidance.

Having moved through school-based roles and then into HE, where she then held managerial roles (and indeed was heavily involved in a professional body), Participant N offered an insightful account of her professional identity, and her view of the profession. In response to her view of careers guidance as being a profession, she hesitated just slightly:

'Erm...well, I think it has, it is an area where you need training, you need to continually train as a professional, erm, (long pause)...this a slightly value judgement, but it is a thinking profession, you need to know a lot, keep abreast, so...yea, qualifications are very important.'

However, her deep understanding of the profession did lead to her initial hesitation: she was well aware of governments' views of careers guidance, and the reduced funding.

When asked about her identity, and if indeed it had developed over time, she was very clear that it had, and positively. Whilst in looking back, she felt she did have an identity when working for organisations, she also recognised that in her HE roles, these were defined more in relation to the organisation:

‘So my identity was linked to me being a Head of Service, or Assistant Head of Service, I rarely had to explain myself, because those roles, and the organisations having a careers service, there was already that cache, you know, like in meetings, I’d introduce myself and people seemed to recognise straight away what I was representing.’

In her current consultancy role, and being on her own, she felt she was ‘constantly having to position myself, and, er...explain what I am trying to do, and why it is important. And because of that repeated process of having to explain myself, then I’ve become much clearer of who I am, and what profession I am in.’ This quote links to Participant P’s experience who had to redefine and represent herself as a brand: not just in business terms, but also in the values, beliefs and identity she projects.

Overall, the threads running through all the accounts are clear: the sense of what the profession stands on, and also what supports their sense of their identity – aspects of which are shared across the settings, but also respond as a result of the particular challenges of these organisations.

5.6.2. The impact of the organisation (positive and negative)

In my introduction, I identified one of the key motivators for my thesis: to explore the extent to which recent government policies have made an adverse impact on the profession, and its practitioners’ sense of professional identity. At the same time, I was also clear that I expected the participants to communicate more readily their dissatisfaction at the way in

which their employer was making a negative impact on their work, and sense of professional esteem. The participants' accounts did not reveal this at all, apart from one from an NCS background who was quite clear about her dissatisfaction: 'It's all about money, all about targets...I cannot do the job properly, seeing clients only three times...I mean the clients I see, they need more, a lot more. I am very passionate about this.' She was also very clear about the negative impact of a target-driven culture on the sense of collegiality (discussing more fully in sub-code 6e below):

'Well, when I started this job...I had to learn, people would talk about things I didn't know about, um, and...and I learnt so much, it's so important knowing information, possible routes, networks...and now targets seem to militate against that, that sharing.'

Interestingly, whilst Participants A, S, T and U (all from NCS backgrounds) echoed her concerns with targets, they did not express the same sense of how negative their employers had been on their sense of professional worth. This is considered below in 6e).

5.6.3 Belonging to, and participation in, a community of practice

A major contextual feature to be reminded of is the decline of the Connexions services in England, so that the school-based participants concerned (n=4) were employed separately by the schools (or on a self-employed basis). The funding pumped into the service from 2001 helped to support commonly-shared information resources, and local information, advice and guidance networks that were free of charge to user groups: indeed, the Children's Trust arrangements from 2006 required agencies concerned with children and young people to work in partnership. All these features have largely disappeared.

Participant L recognised this from her previous role as a Connexions Adviser: 'For all its faults, Connexions did provide a structure for meetings and networks. You were always

having meetings, you were on the phone all the time to other colleagues, saying, what do you think of blah blah blah.’ In response, she contacted other school-based advisers in her area to form a more informal network: ‘X convenes a CEIAG group, and we meet once a term, and she is constantly sending information...and so, you know, there is a community of us out there.’ Part of the benefit of the community is to make contact with other practitioners who can share issues, and understand the challenges of working alone in a school. The other benefit is in the sharing of information, and especially LMI: a feature that was very important to the participant’s sense of identity.

Participant P shared this sense of what had been lost – though she was relatively more relieved to move out from under Connexions’ yoke – and what structures needed to replace it:

‘The network we have, it keeps me going, in fact, erm, we want to keep it local and between us, so we can look issues, you know, that are shared by all of us, the meetings are more productive and useful as a result, unlike the meetings in Connexions, God, they used to go on and on, they were so many people, fighting to be heard, you know, I didn’t find them at all helpful.’

Participant R added to this view: ‘In our network, it’s like we’re getting back to, um, careers guidance, that’s what we are in our group, we’re careers advisers.’ Whilst there was a suggestion of some exclusiveness – in contrast to those networks promoted by the local authorities – these groups seem to confirm and bolster the renewed sense of professional identity, and connection with other practitioners. Again, the decline of Connexions seems to have presented these participants with a chance to redefine their identities and networks.

The sense of bolstering, and re-defining, was evident in part when those from further education-based settings talked of their participation in networks. They also spoke of the

need to reach out and renew contacts that had also been adversely affected by the decline in local Connexions services. Participant E was very clear on this:

‘It’s good to be part of a developing network, especially given the new members from schools, and their new responsibilities, you know, in having to work with schools directly, erm, the direction has to come from them (the advisers) now and the network we have can help.’

She was also clear about the benefit of being in the network with others from colleges and schools in her area: ‘The people I come across now, that we share the same values, we’re all very passionate about careers guidance’; and ‘it does give me a sense of identity, it adds to it, because in a big college like this when there are only two of us, and there are hundreds of tutors, and it is easy to feel a bit lost sometimes.’

Participant F also identified similar benefits, particularly in terms of information sharing, boosting job motivation and helping her sense of identity:

‘The network meetings bring us all together, sharing information, the sharing helps to improve our service, yea, definitively...also, being pro-active, we’re very pro-active, always on the lookout for developments, you get to hear such a lot you wouldn’t otherwise, it’s really helped my identity to develop, I feel a lot more confident, yea, I do.’

These two accounts – both of which capture the individual and collegial benefits of sharing – seem at variance to much else in the education sector, where schools, colleges and HEIs now compete strongly for numbers; and the professional value of collaboration, and contributing to the common good of a professional network, seems (in my experience) much less encouraged.

As indicated previously, Participant J was moving away from careers guidance towards a more educational role. And yet, she spoke positively about the sense of connection she has with practitioners from other organisational settings and who work with other clients, to the extent that the networking overturned her sense that careers guidance is fragmented:

‘Talking to others, it always seemed different in different organisations, the work, you know, and it’s hard to relate to different posts, like in schools, or even other colleges, my work can seem, like, um, like it’s different...but there are things in common, you’re dealing with people who need advice, so you’re going to have...you’ll have similar work but in different contexts, and it is working with people with the same values even though at first the work might seem different.’

This is an important statement in the context of my thesis: that even a practitioner who is leaving the profession, and has expressed quite equivocal views about her training, still found much in common with practitioners elsewhere as a result of networking. A further dimension is thus emerging from the data: how enabling networks and connections can be to developing a sense of the profession, and professional identity.

Participant H offered quite an historical view of the idea of belonging to a community. Her career, in spanning over three decades, developed at a time when the profession, and its bodies (like the former ICG) were relatively more influential and better funded, with (at least in relation to work in schools) clearer workforce development structures. She took quite a droll view of the former ICG conferences: ‘They were often little jaunties to help your career’ – though at least this showed the importance of ‘going to conference’ to one’s professional and career development (and I can attest to this from my own experience!). That said, she spoke very proudly of her role as the DipCG regional training co-ordinator, and of the reciprocal nature in the relationship with the trainees: ‘I

learnt a lot from the students, bringing in new ideas, approaches, you know, energy...no doubt about it.’ This account is interesting in comparison with those participants who are relatively new to careers guidance. The latter are setting about developing, or renewing, networks with some energy, while this participant, at the edge of retirement, looked back and indicated the extent and importance of the professional networks – a feature that reflects a previous period of large, extensive, and well-funded careers guidance providers.

There was a degree of contrast between the HEI participants’ view (n=3) and those expressed by participants from the two settings above. The sense from the data was that the participants felt they were part of strong internal, and service-based community of practitioners, where team meetings, service-based training days, events, and day-to-day interaction, provided them with the support they needed. Participant B expressed her sense of being part of such an internal community thus: ‘my qualification gives me credibility, and it is good being part of a team, a careers team, with others with similar qualifications...we discuss a lot in the team.’ By contrast, she was aware that AGCAS and its networks existed, but ‘I don’t use it much...it is good to know that there are others doing similar jobs, but I don’t really go to AGCAS things.’ Participant C held a similar view: ‘I use AGCAS as and when, more for information...techie IT things mainly...it’s hard to keep with AGCAS, though.’ In this area of her account, she expressed a very strong orientation to her organisation, which, she felt, had made a ‘massive impact’ on her development, and had helped to make her more adaptable and flexible in developing her organisation’s employability work. When asked about her participation in AGCAS, or other communities of practice, Participant D was more negative, even regretful, about her lack of involvement: ‘No (sigh)...erm...which is a shame...but, no. We are on the AGCAS link, but I think we are quite different, quite dynamic.’ Her account also reflected more strongly a growing element of competition between the careers services of other HEIs, particularly in securing

employer involvement in events. The three participants' accounts reflect the impact of the increasing sense of competition between HEIs, and how employability (or positive destination) rates are an aspect of this competitiveness.

Participants from adult guidance-based settings were also less definite when discussing their sense of belonging to, and participation in, a community of other practitioners. Participant A indicated that she did, 'but only in my organisation...not so much with others, certainly not nationally, not any of the professional bodies.' When asked why, she smiled and said, 'Time, John, time, and money...and targets.'

That said, only one from an NCS background spoke with some feeling about not belonging to a community at all. Participant H spoke of the distance and even hostility between her and her colleagues. The idea of belonging to a professional body, like the CDI, seemed very remote, almost not to make sense: 'Why would I want to do that? It costs money, for a start, and how would it help me in my role?' The effect of hearing this aspect of her narrative was to throw the more positive accounts considered above into sharper relief: that hers was the only really seriously discordant note in a largely positive and empowered overall story.

5.7 Conclusions

This chapter has presented my analysis of the data from the interviews, and identified the emergent main codes, their sub-codes and axials (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). These form the basis of the next chapter, which will also present my model of professional identity for careers guidance practitioners.

At this point, I can critically reflect on the process of operating grounded theory method to generate the substantive codes, and in particular using coding axials (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Firstly, the experience of listening again to the participants' narratives, and

the process of transcribing them, was both time-consuming and extremely valuable to the coding process. As a result, I knew the narratives in great detail, and so could readily cite relevant details and quotes. In addition, the method of generating initial codes, reflecting on them, theoretically sampling, transcribing as I went, writing memos and notes gave me a research discipline and allowed me to immerse myself in the data without losing the kind of strategic perspectives that grounded theory method also demands: that is, what overall sense are the data making? Using the axial coding (Ibid.) was not one I had anticipated using initially; but reflections on the initial codes also encouraged me to reflect on the most appropriate coding procedure in relation to the participants' narratives. This experience confirmed the iterative nature and artistry of grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014).

Whilst the conclusions from the data are presented in the next chapter, it is useful to draw together the common features contained in the codes. Firstly, and in terms of the motivation to enter the profession, the participants identified a common aim: to make a difference to people in a major area of their life. In seeking to make such a difference, over half wanted to actively change their occupation, and move from roles that represented managerialist approaches to human resources, to career guidance, which values people as ends in themselves. The satisfactions derived from their roles reflected this drive to make a difference, and work with people in respectful, empowering humanistic ways. The participants' sense of wanting to work with particular groups – adults, or young people, or indeed as part of a locality – added dimensions and depth to this code. Despite some expectations to the contrary, few of the participants expressed outright dissatisfaction with their role. Underpinning the satisfactions that emerged was a clear sense of the impact of the qualifications they had followed on the participants' work, whatever the level of qualification. In relation to the latter, the participants demonstrated their knowledgeability of what a profession, and being professional, meant; their accounts also revealed the near-

unanimous sense of belonging to a profession, and having a professional identity. Their expertise in career-related information, and LMI, was a key identifying feature for them: expertise that, in their view, other profession did not have to same depth and breadth. Crucially, the participants expressed a strong sense that this in-depth knowledge also helped to promote client-centredness. Further, most expressed a sense of belonging to a community of practice, even if this was limited to their organisation, particularly as it allowed them to share resources, information and support. Again, this feature helped to bolster the participants' sense of belonging to a profession, and professional identity. One final salient aspect was how all of the above empowered the participants, particularly those in schools, FE and HE, to promote their services, and indeed negotiate delivery, in ways that were predicated on ethical principles.

Overall, the depth and strength of the participants' narratives revealed how skilful and knowledgeable they felt they appeared as professionals. This point speaks most strongly to the theoretical perspective I have adopted in my thesis. The next chapter will therefore critically analyse the implications of this perspective in relation to the date for the generation of my thesis.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION; AND GENERATING A MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented my data findings and main codes derived from grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) that subsequently formed the basis of my model of professional identity. Before presenting the model in this chapter, I will examine the links between the codes and the theoretical concepts I considered in chapters three and five. The aim is to critically evaluate the ways in which existing knowledge of, and discourse concerning, the professional identity of careers guidance practitioners is being appraised and extended, so that the contribution of my thesis is clearly identified.

Part of the genesis of my research was to address the prevailing discourses regarding careers guidance: that of a fragmented profession, with disempowered and disconnected practitioners who lack a shared sense of professional identity, and whose orientation is to their organisation rather than a wider sense of shared professionalism. In addition, the literature concerning the development of the profession, and its practitioners, is often informed by functionalist and power perspectives, and overlooks individual agency. These perspectives are consistent with the oppositional, managerialist/practitioner paradigm common to the debates concerning public sector professions (e.g., Evetts, 2005). In challenging these more general perspectives, my thesis has used strong structuration (Stones, 2005) as an analytical perspective to explore what practitioners actually do and how they conceive of, and express, their sense of agency and professional identity. Instead of assuming an ontology-in-general, both in relation to the effects of government policies and an assumed, more general definition of professional identity, this thesis examines the ontic level (Ibid) of practitioners'

day-to-day practices, and the features of their identity. The application of this theoretical perspective is unique in the literature concerning careers guidance.

The discussion that follows is structured so that each main code that emerged from the data presented in the previous chapter is discussed. Each section considers much of what is already understood about the profession; and the ways in which the codes I have generated, and my main theoretical perspective critically evaluates the limitations of this existing knowledge.

6.2 Motivation to enter the profession

In considering the first main code, motivation to enter the profession, some of the perspectives considered in chapter two are relevant here, particularly those that have created an impression that careers guidance may not seem an appealing profession to enter at all. The entry routes seem confusing and fragmented, and appear to depend on which sector one wants to enter. Required qualifications and training routes are contingent and varied, too. Whilst working in the statutory sector in England from the 1970s to 1999, practitioners were expected (but not legally required) to have the DipCG (Peck, 2004), the arrival of Connexions heralded a new qualification framework as discussed in chapter two, such as a changing pattern of the already established NVQ-based programmes alongside the new QCG. For schools in England, (and, indeed, FE and HE) there is still no legally required qualification standard, despite intense lobbying by the CDI and its predecessor, the ICG. Robert's (2013) very bleak view of the state of the profession, especially in schools, is indicative of careers guidance's apparently damaged reputation.

And yet - the research participants' narratives showed a different view. For those actively seeking to change their occupation (n=11), then careers guidance represented more appealing, more definite, more authentic work than that held previously. Common to all

these accounts was the very strong sense of wanting to help people, and make a difference to their decisions about their lives. More crucially, the profession represented an opportunity for the research participants to exercise their agency and autonomy to help clients as they are, as in Kantian language, as ends in themselves (Norman, 1998). This motivation is in direct contrast to more managerially-orientated roles such as HR, which view employees as the means to achieve business objectives. In addition, the research participants' common aim of helping others in an ethical way is in direct contract to the functionalist expectations of careers guidance as discussed in chapter two, such as acting as mere gatekeepers to employment and training opportunities.

Giddens's (1984) concept of duality is instructive here, too. In conceiving careers guidance as offering the opportunity to work more ethically and authentically, then the research participants had not simply swallowed societal views towards, or governmental expectations of, the profession. In this sense, one can say that they are carrying very clear views on what guidance should achieve for clients: expectations, and indeed agency, that they enact when engaging with whichever organisational structure they are employed within. This central question of the precise relationship between agency and structure, as explored in chapter three, is thus key here, particularly when analysing the skills and motivations the research participants are mobilising in their everyday practices. Bourbieu's concept of habitus (1989) also offers a further perspective here in relation to the research participants' desire to become careers guidance practitioners – that is, they were seeking a different work environment, one that would allow them to embody more authentic ways of being in their work. It was as if they had been searching for a more fulfilling relationship between their frustrated agency and the employment structures: one that was offered by careers guidance.

Before moving onto the next two main codes, a further point regarding agency is worth considering here. Stones (2005) identified five aspects of this concept, including the

notion of shifting horizons for action, and an agent's creative abilities. This is why, in part, the main code of motivation to enter the profession identifies active change to occupational context. That most of the research participants actively chose the profession for what it offers, and were able to realise this aim, shows how effective they were in realising their goals. This point further strengthens the view of active, knowledgeable social actors (Giddens, 1984) as they entered and then continued to work within careers guidance provider settings.

6.3 Job satisfactions and dissatisfactions

With most the research practitioners so motivated and primed, however, the reality of organisationally-orientated performativity (Banks, 2006) of much public sector provision, not just careers guidance, could have disappointed and disillusioned the practitioners. Based on research considered in chapter two, such as Colley et al. (2010), one might have expected to encounter such views expressed by the research participants. As the data show, this view was challenged by the prevailing level and strength of satisfaction that I encountered in the narratives of all but two of the nineteen research participants. These findings reflect in part the benefits of the research method I adopted: one that enabled me to really listen to and immerse myself in the data, so that the particular, ontic level (Stones, 2005) of everyday practices emerged in ways that also revealed commonalities, regardless of the provider setting. The following key aspects are particularly notable in the generation of my thesis.

Firstly, the research participants expressed both a fundamental satisfaction in helping clients with their career choices; and being able to do so. In this way, nearly all of the research participants (n=17) expressed a powerful sense of satisfaction and agency in having the scope and autonomy to work with clients in ways that made a difference. Again, the pattern that emerged from the data is very much against the prevailing view expressed in the

literature in chapter two, where performance targets have the effect of demotivating and disempowering practitioners. As the data from this study indicates, the research participants enjoyed the ways in which they could use their sense of agency to help clients in ethical ways. This links to a further key point, and one which the attention to the precise details of the research participants' narratives afforded, even for the two people who did express dissatisfaction with their role. All drew satisfaction, and affirmation from client feedback, whether that was formally sought or informally volunteered. In this way, the satisfaction gained from realising a desired occupational value – helping clients ethically – was heightened and validated by such feedback, and was not necessarily *dependent* on managerial recognition. This was particularly so for those from schools, and NCS/adult guidance settings. As the research participants worked in what they described as client-centred ways, the clients then responded positively to this approach, and thus affirmed its value. Further, the feedback strengthened the research participants' confidence in their role and their sense of professional identity as being committed to client-centred careers guidance – a professional methodology and method that was not reliant on managerially-sanctioned reward systems.

Two further dimensions are also important to the sense of careers guidance agents, if I can use that term, which emerged from the study. As the data show, the research participants also highlighted their pride in being skilful: that interviewing clients in particular was not a common, everyday skill (Banks, 2006), but one that demanded expertise and commitment. This point will be examined further when the impact of qualifications on professional identity is considered later in this chapter. However, it is worth noting here, since the trait approaches to defining a profession considered in chapter two are not without merit (Millerson, 1964). Thus, the traits of the profession identified by the research participants were, in part, client interviewing, and its associated skills, e.g., active and deep listening (Egan, 2014). The other dimension alluded to in the data is the research participants' conscious sense of adopting

techniques such as reflection in action (Schon, 1995), particularly when being presented with complex narratives that needed in-depth careers guidance skills (Ali and Graham, 1996).

Here, I come back to Participant K's enduring fascination with 'every wee story that walks through the door' as a most apposite example of this intense commitment to facilitating client learning and growth during an interview.

It is clear that most of the research participants' sense of job satisfaction, as it both confirms and strengthens their sense of professional identity, links to the Stones' (2005) notion of active agency and autonomy. This thread will be explored further when the impact of qualifications on professional identity is discussed next.

6.4 Impact of qualifications on professional identity

The next major code relates to the impact of qualifications on professional identity. Part of the discourse concerning the profession and its practitioners, considered in chapter two, included one of careers guidance's lack of a defining trait of a profession (Millerson, 1964). This is the regulatory bargain (MacDonald, 1995) made with the state to control the means by which practitioners were legally allowed to practise; and the sole ownership of a clear, required and over-arching qualification and training framework. Through the functionalist and power lens, the profession has been subject to rapidly shifting governmental dictums (Watts, 2014) without any apparent leverage. The resulting fragmented qualification menu, that at various times over the last twenty years, has included QCG, NVQ, and QCF qualifications at different levels, and has been reliant on provider and national contexts. In this way, the profession and its practitioners may indeed seem semi-professional in being reduced to mere employees of organisations, rather than members of a profession with strong professional identities (Banks, 2004).

However, as the narratives of the research participants in this study showed time and again, they were not victims of apparently sovereign forces (Mackey, 2007). Instead, the data showed the critical importance of the qualifications they had achieved to their practice and sense of identity, even in the few instances where the circumstances of the training were less than ideal. Again, the value of an ontic level of analysis (Stones, 2005) is valuable here, particularly in challenging assumptions about the relative value of one qualification, e.g., the QCG as against the NVQ; and about the aspects of the learning and training most valued by the research participants. For example, most of research participants (n=17) identified the ways in which the qualifications had instilled in them the importance of ethical, client-centred careers guidance that recognised the potential and value of the clients. A critical note to make here is that they were perhaps bound to identify this aspect more readily, since they were seeking more authentic and ethical roles. However, the overall sense from the research participants' narratives is that the qualifications both foregrounded the centrality of the client-centred approach, and provided the theoretical and reflective framework for this to become an embodied commitment. The strength of the narratives showed how the research participants felt this, rather than simply knowing it.

What was also unexpected in the data was the research participants' view of theories of career choice – theories that make up a central part of the curriculum of the QCG. Their view differed from the idea that a tenet of professions is a knowledge-generating trait (Millerson, 1964). Instead, their narratives emphasised the importance to them of theory to practice or, to express this point in another way, how such theories helped them to be more client-centred in appreciating the complexity of life choices. In this way, understanding such complexity encouraged them to distrust directive, assumptive, advice (that may have been more convenient to an organisation), since this may not be appropriate for the client. Further still, it was as if they were also adopting (unwittingly, perhaps) an ontic level approach (Stones,

2005) in their client work. That is, attending to the ontology in situ (Ibid.) of the person, rather than making generalised assumptions based on presumptions and prejudice.

Added to this key aspect of their professional value and identity, the research participants also noted how the qualifications that they held had encouraged them to adopt the reflective stance (Johns, 2013). Again, this was common to nearly all of them (n=17), regardless of their setting. Indeed, this stance seemed the foundation on which their sense of identity rested. The sense of embodiment, of inhabiting and almost living their ethical commitment, emerged as a determining aspect of their identity.

At the same time, the central importance of their qualifications did not appear to have distanced them from the structures within which they worked (Giddens, 1984). Instead, the research participants were clear that their training had established a standard that they felt enabled them to do a good job for their clients and the organisation. In this sense, the beliefs of what careers guidance should do, and be, as carried internally, helped nearly all of the research participants (n=17) to develop as committed and engaged agents. The benefits to clients of such agency have been discussed extensively above; however, what also emerged was that the research participants had also developed skills and approaches, as well as tactical nous, which enabled them to work within structures, and also to affect change. Participant L's narrative is a case in point (see chapter five), where she felt that her expertise added value to the school's business planning, and also promoted the importance of careers guidance to the learners. These key points are considered in more detail in the next two sections below, where the importance of Stones's Quadripartite model (2005) in the latter part of the discussion is shown to be a particularly useful analytical perspective for examining the full extent of the sense of professional identity.

6.5 Making meanings: concepts and definitions

The next main code concerned the sense that the participants made of the terms profession, professional, and professional. Asking the research participants for their sense of what these mean could have appeared as a small grammatical test. However, the common elements of their answers was revealing for a number of reasons. Firstly, their responses demonstrated their understanding of what a profession, and being professional, meant, e.g., in terms of their perceptions of the traits of a profession, such as requiring higher level qualifications. In addition, the meaning they attributed to the term 'professional' encompassed ways of being and behaving, not just the status attached to a particular job. As some of the research participants argued, cleaners can be professional in the way in which they take pride, and find dignity, in doing a good job. Applying Giddens' (1984) duality of structure as an analytical perspective, I find strong links with the research participants' commitment to client-centredness: that is, that each career choice should be viewed with equal value, no matter if a client is considering a career as a barrister or working as a cleaner. In other words, they have developed these perspectives, and values, by making sense of their experiences, and then applying what is of value to them when operating within their everyday structures, i.e., their practitioner roles. That they struggled more to define 'professional identity' was interesting, in that for me their responses to the two previous terms actually demonstrated their understanding of the concept, but without recognising the precise phrasing.

A key point of the interviews with the research participants was when I asked them if they felt they belonged to a profession. That around three quarters of the sample (n=16) responded immediately and very strongly, irrespective of their organisational setting, was notable; and again is a direct challenge to the discourses concerning the profession and its practitioners. The three who were equivocal still demonstrated a high degree of

knowledgeability about the profession and their place in it. For example, Participant K's lengthy experience of the provider structures she had worked within, and had helped to influence as a training co-ordinator for the DipCG, afforded her a sardonic perspective on the inevitability of change. However, she still spoke with some vehemence about the effect of Connexions on the profession – 'it all changed when Connexions came in, and we lost such a lot, guidance, even the name, you couldn't even say careers guidance' - in this way, her view was consistent with Colley and colleagues (2010), though it was the only one of the five based in schools to be so. Participant G's position also reflected knowledgeable insights into her role liminality (Gourlay, 2010): that is, being conscious of the importance of her QCG-informed careers guidance function, but operating within predominantly social and community work structures. Still, her narrative indicated her agency and creativity in getting them to work for her clients, e.g., when she felt that practitioners from other professions were more concerned with 'ticking boxes' rather than being, in her view, 'truly client-centred...I try and be ethical while still getting the best for the young people...like being more flexible, less judgemental, to get the best outcomes, you know.'

Even more important than their views on careers guidance as a profession were the research participants' responses to the question concerning their professional identity. Nearly all (n=18) were unequivocal and did not hesitate in expressing their view that they had such an identity. Only one (Participant J) offered a negative response, and she was moving to a different educational role. In discussing this major finding, Stones' (2005) model of structuration will now be used as the main analytical perspective as follows.

6.6 The features of the professional identity – conditions for action and commitments

The next main code concerned the features of a professional identity as identified by the participants. To explore such features, I will use the aspects of the Quadripartite model

(Ibid.) to draw out the features of professional identity expressed by the research participants. The first two are the External and Internal environments. As discussed in chapter three, the model does not bestow these terms with everyday meanings. The External arena concerns not just external features such as government policy, but the ‘action horizon in situ’ and ‘conditions for action’ (Ibid: 84 -5). Put more simply, and in relation to careers guidance, these concern the issues and challenges faced by the research participants in their provider settings that have emerged partly as a result of national policies and particular aspects of those setting. All of those who worked in schools (n=5) were grappling in part with the continuing impacts of the Education Act (2011), and revised statutory guidance (DfE, 2013), but also dealing with competition for resources, and developing the profile and esteem of their role and careers guidance. Those in FE (n=4) faced similar issues of resources and profile; while all of the research participants in HE (n=3) also engaged with challenges to their organisational value while driving the employability agenda. The research participants from the NCS (n=5) were faced by the need to balance challenging organisational targets and their commitment to client-centred work. One condition of action that was common to these organisational settings was the need to affirm the value of careers guidance, and translate their professionalism and identity into desired outcomes.

The Internal aspect of the model has two elements that confirm the sensitising analytic properties of strong Structuration (Stones, 2005) in relation to my discussion. The first element draws on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (1989), in considering the more general dispositions of the agents in focus – in this case, the research participants. As the data suggest, these dispositions, or as I would label them, facets of professional identity, include: a shared commitment to client-centred careers guidance that makes a difference to the individual; pride in skilful, expert guidance; and the central importance of qualifications to being and practice. Stones then combines this habitus with a concept explored by Mouzelis

(1991) – that of position practices, or, expressed more simply, what practitioners do at a point in time when dealing with the features and constraints of (in this case) organisational structures. He extends the notion of position practices to label it ‘conjunctionally specific knowledge of external structures’ (2005: 85). Thus, when the research participants engaged with organisational structures to promote their work and its value, they did so using the specific features of their employer. For example, those in schools needed to form networks and relationships with teachers, and the leadership team, in order to create the everyday means by which young people would be helped in ways that were both consistent with the schools’ targets, and the practitioners’ commitment to careers guidance. This conjunction of client and organisational needs refers back in part to the research participants’ recognition of the fact that they work as part of organisational structures. Further, the conjunction also enabled them to transfer an occupational value – of enacting Kantian respect for persons (Norman, 1998) – to their dealings and negotiations with other colleagues. In this way, they embody respectful and professional practice not just with clients, but with those with whom they negotiate on a weekly (or even daily) basis.

This is a key and surprising point of the research participants’ sense of professional identity, and what they represent. Instead of being skewered by managerialism, or retreating to allegiances to a more general, professional body-based ontology, the research participants act within structures to use (and reshape) them (Giddens, 1984) in ways that are consistent with their ethical commitment to guidance. In other words, I am a careers guidance practitioner, and all that means, in all my work, not just with clients. In relation to his point, one of the more remarkable features of the data was the way in which the participants expressed their ontology in situ (Stones, 2005) to the point where they were promoting a brand, e.g., as participant P noted: ‘I’ve become more conscious...I’ve had to re-brand myself, um, and relaunch myself, you know, and have a business card (laughs) which is mine,

that is me, you know.’ Interestingly, the challenges posed shifting horizons for action had resulted in a particularly creative response (Ibid.) – that of a professional identity that was strengthened by the ways in which they had managed the particular effects of various government policies on their work and sense of professional self. Again, these two are examples of how the manner in which agents, with values, skills and experience, engage in particular (and also empowered) ways with the structures that govern their work.

Before moving on to consider the third aspect of Stones’s model (2005), active agency, one additional aspect of conjunctionally-specific practices is also worth considering for the further insights it offers to my thesis. I mentioned above that a common condition of action of all the research participants was the need to promote the value of careers guidance to the various stakeholders of the services. In addition, a more ontic level (Ibid.) of analysis also reveals particular expressions of this commitment in relation to the provider settings in which they worked. For example, those in schools reported a very strong commitment to working with young people, so that their decision-making skills and choices were developed for them, rather than the convenience of the schools concerned, e.g., wanting to only promote their sixth forms to year 11 students. Much of the research participants’ negotiations with the schools were concerned with reminding senior managers of the business value of impartial guidance, not just for client-centred reasons. For those who worked in NCS settings, three spoke very genuinely about their commitment to the prosperity of a geographical area – a commitment that spoke their deep loyalty to the region concerned, particularly as they had grown up there. Participant T is an example of the latter point: ‘I am a xxx person, a xxx kid, I know a lot about this city.’ Linked to this was a firm belief in careers guidance’s role in promoting social justice: how supporting and empowering client choice was one of the ways in which the research participants could further this value.

6.7 Features of professional identity: active agency

Having examined the ways in which the specifics of the external and internal environments helped to demonstrate some of the facets of identity, then Stones' model of active agency (2005) helps to illuminate other key features. The research participants' – indeed, agents' – creative response to shifting horizons for action can be characterised by examining the particulars of their organisational setting. As mentioned, those in schools faced a choice of moving from Connexions to being directly employed by schools (or used on a consultancy basis). Their creative response was to negotiate with the schools' senior leaders to set performance targets; something that had been imposed previously by the ways in which central government constantly reformed the Connexions' service (Watts and MacGowan, 2007). What these participants reported was the positive and strengthening effect on their sense of professionalism and identity: that, in their view, the focus was placed back on careers guidance, and on them as careers guidance practitioners, not Connexions workers. This sense of liberation in their accounts, despite the challenges of promoting their profile, was very notable. For those in FE (n=4), there was a similar sense of how the research participants' perception of organisational targets, e.g., retention and progression rates, had only affirmed the value of careers guidance, and of their role as guidance practitioners, to their clients. Once more, the research participants recognised the need for accountability, and to work within structures; however, this served only to strengthen their commitment to promoting and providing client-centred services. The responses of those from NCS settings in particular (n=5) attested to the fact that, although they acknowledged they were also working within structures, and had to meet to performance targets, they still found ways of implementing their ethical approach. Participant A's view is an example of the latter: 'I understand the need for financial viability, some sort of measure, but it's the rigidity of the targets, and how they are implemented'; what kept her motivated was the

positive client feedback. Again, the research participants' narratives revealed an overall picture that the need to continually restate the importance of their role, often in the face of organisational challenges, had actually solidified their identity, rather than weakened it.

A further indicator of Stones' (2005) conception of active agency is the agents' organisational awareness, indeed their critical distance from the policies and processes, and the value that they perceive they are adding to their work. This is a particularly useful perspective when identifying a cornerstone of the research participants' sense of identity. To begin with, and using Stones' notion of conditions for action (Ibid.), I would suggest that such preconditions for knowledgeable social action (Giddens, 1984) are the motivations and qualifications held by the research participants that enable them to be critical of environments in which they operate and shape. An example of this criticality is their ability to recognise the need to work within, and be accountable to, organisations, while still maintaining their commitment to client centred practice. It is also an example of how, in promoting reflective practice, the qualifications promote knowing and being, rather than simply doing.

As a result of this reflective awareness, all of the research participants (n=19) expressed the central importance of their expertise in career-related information and LMI to the value they add to clients' choices and the organisations within which they work. This demonstrated two critical points: the extent of the understanding of the value the organisation was seeking from careers guidance services; and how this expertise helps to define them as professionals. In relation to the former, all of those in schools (n=5) indicated how the depth and width of their LMI knowledge enabled impartial guidance, but also helped inform the schools' development and planning, particularly in relation to meeting government targets for those entering education, employment or training, e.g. by providing more accurate information about the entry requirements of HEIs, and the local labour market. Having such expertise not only helped the research participants to feel equal in status to the teachers, but

also strengthened their sense of professional identity. It is also worth noting that their sense of being careers guidance and LMI specialists links in part to Larson's definition (1977) of a profession, and the esoteric body of knowledge that only those who are particularly qualified have. This sense of particular (and not every day) expertise was shared by other research participants, e.g., by those in FE (n=4) and HE (n=3), who also felt that in-depth knowledge was vital to their identity and practice, and helped them to add value to academics' subject knowledge. And as Participant A from an NCS background noted, she felt that the need for in-depth LMI allied to guidance principles helped the profession to seem more 'concrete and solid', rather than career counselling or coaching which seemed to her 'rather watery'. Again, I was impressed by the ways in which this critical and knowledgeable engagement with, and shaping of, organisational structures, was contrary to the discourses considered in chapter two. These were not disempowered, cultural dopes (Giddens, 1984), or those whose options were a retreat to a kind of existential, highly individualised state of resilience, with little connection to other practitioners, (Mulvey, 2013), but active and creative agents.

As well as being experts in terms of LMI, and how to operate within organisations, the research participants on the whole expressed the need to make contact with other practitioners, not just from the same employment context, but broader, e.g., with those from schools. The reasons for this were three-fold. Firstly, they stressed the importance to them of sharing good practice and resources, rather than competing (and one which was very much consistent with their motivations for entering the profession). Again, this is another example of them embodying the values of careers guidance. Secondly, this was also a creative response to shifting horizons (Stones, 2005). For example, the demise of Connexions, and the formal requirement for practitioners to work in organised networks (Watts, 2015), meant that practitioners in schools and FE in the main were no longer part of information, advice and guidance networks. In order to reassert the values of sharing knowledge and expertise,

the research participants were clear how they had reached out to other practitioners, either to create new networks, or to re-enact previous ones. Thirdly, these individuals also confirmed how affirmed these links, and being a member of such networks, were on their professional identity. That is, the sense of belonging to a collective, and refusing to accept the atomised view of the profession discussed in chapter two, and simply interacting with other, similar practitioners, helped confirm their sense of professional self. For those in NCS and adult guidance settings, the need to connect with other colleagues who were working on different projects within a local area was very strong, as much for boosting morale, and affirming each other's commitment to client-centred work. Perhaps for those from HE the urge to reach beyond their service confines was not as urgent, due to the sense they expressed of being part of a larger, supportive team, e.g., as Participant B indicated, she felt she had gained most support and insights from her colleagues rather than from contact with other HEI practitioners, and with AGCAS, especially as the latter seemed 'very remote...it's useful for information, but I don't meet with others from other services.'. However, what they had in common with the other participants was the recognition of the professional value of sharing, and contributing to a collective.

As demonstrated in the data chapter, not all of the research participants expressed a shared sense of belonging and contributing to a community (n=1 for HE; n=2 from FE; n=1 from NCS). However, three of those were about to change their roles – retiring, or in the cases of D and J, moving to new jobs. Once again, the narratives presented by most of the research participants (n=15) offered a very different picture from those who perceive careers guidance as fragmented, and its practitioners rather isolated and disconnected from others (e.g., Mulvey, 2013). That said, there is an aspect of the data that is of concern for the relevant professional bodies (the CDI and AGCAS) – that is, all of the research participants expressed a lack of connection with, or active participation in these more formalised

structures and communities. As Peck (2004) noted, the former ICG had enjoyed a high profile with governments, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, and its annual conferences were well-attended, with much discussion amongst practitioners. I can draw on my own experience here of being involved in AGCAS from the early 1990s; for instance, the competition to join the association's committees, or information generation groups, could be quite fierce, with HE practitioners keen to get involved in order to further their profile and careers. For the ICG, such involvement was indicated by the prevalence of active regional groups that met for continuing professional development activities, e.g., talks from employers; or information sharing. The arguments made by Evetts (2005) and Banks (2006) about the re-orientation of practitioners to organisational accountabilities may have some applicability here: that although the research participants in this study acted creatively, and otherwise, (Giddens, 1984) in forming new communities, they were not formally connected with the professional bodies. The CDI and AGCAS do boast of their membership levels; but one wonders if the previous sense of professional habitus (Bourdieu, 1989), when practitioners saw active participation in professional bodies as part of their role, has been largely eroded.

In drawing together the points discussed in this chapter, clear patterns have emerged in the research participants' sense of professional identity and esteem. Their shared habitus (Bourdieu, 1989), whatever their organisational setting, included the following features:

- A common motivation to help clients with crucial life choices in ways that were informed and motivated by a strong need to make a difference;
- Clear sense of satisfaction in using their skills and expertise to help clients in ethical ways, with the client's feedback being a central affirming aspect;

- For those in schools and NCS settings, an additional commitment to working either with particular client groups, e.g., young people, or with people from a particular area, insofar as careers guidance could promote social justice;
- The critical importance of a qualification in information, advice and guidance (whatever their level) to the affirmation and development of client-centred, skilful, reflective practice;
- The ways in their in-depth knowledge of career-related information and LMI both enabled client-centred guidance and signified their professional expertise that was of value to clients and their employers;
- The need to embody ethical approaches in all aspects of their work, e.g., when negotiating with colleagues, networks and managers, and not just when working with clients;
- A strong commitment to operating as part of a network, such as with internal colleagues or with those from other providers, in order to share good practice, and to strengthen the sense of professional identity by belonging to a collective;
- A firm sense of belonging to a profession and having a professional identity, while acknowledging the impact of organisational and policy contexts.

In overall terms, then, these points offer a competing perspective to the negative discourses that I have referred to throughout this discussion, and which I critically considered in chapter two. For the next section, I draw on the theoretical perspectives discussed in chapter three, such as Bourdieu, Giddens, Mouzelis and Stones, to develop a model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) of professional identity for careers guidance practitioners – one which I will argue has implications for the ways in which careers guidance is often located within current academic discourses concerning the professions and professional identity.

6.8 A Model of professional identity

At this juncture, it is relevant to revisit one of the challenges posed by Stones (2005) when proposing his model of strong structuration: that is, the need for robust empirical research, particularly when researchers explore the endlessly fascinating relationship between agency and structure. As noted in my introduction, and methodology and methods chapter, one of the major motivations for my thesis has been to explore, and dimensionalise, the precise relationship between careers guidance practitioners and the political, organisational and communal contexts within which they work. As Stones (Ibid.) notes, part of the criticism of Giddens and Bourdieu is that they assume an ontology-in-general that overlooks the more precise ways in which agents actually work, and make sense of everyday contexts they inhabit. The following model has emerged from the research participants' narratives, and the need to address the weaknesses and limitations of discourses I have considered.

The first, foundational aspects of the model draw on Bourdieu's (1989) concept of habitus, and Stones' (2005:101) conditions for 'agents' motivated and purposeful action', as well as the notion of agents in focus. Whilst Bourdieu's (1989) ideas have been criticised for being too general, the kernel of habitus is applicable here, particularly in the ways it refers to the ways in which agents transform and master the assets that they possess to create shared habits and dispositions. The particular dispositions and assets of the research participants in focus (that both reflect their organisational contexts but are not constrained by them) concern their motivations, commitment to acting in desired ways, their qualifications and skills, indeed their overall belief systems and knowledgeability. Shared by all the research participants (n=19) was a strong motivation to make a difference to clients in ways that recognised and promoted the latter's potential and value. At the ontic level (Ibid.) some were motivated to support particular client groups, such as young people in schools. Also shared was the strong belief that careers guidance offered this opportunity to work in these desired,

ethical ways, in contrast to more managerially-orientated professions (such as HR) which used employees as the means to business ends. As well as such strong motivation to make a difference, often to social justice, then further critical elements of the research participants-in-focus's assets were their qualifications. Whatever their level or type (QCG, or NVQ), the research participants had developed (and had affirmed) the importance of client-centred services that were enabled by theories and models, so that the latter served expert and respectful practice, not the other way around. In this way, their belief in careers guidance was deepened: as a skilful, reflective, ethical and committed process, and one that not everyone could do. In addition, a further characteristic of this particular habitus was a knowledgeable and informed belief system: that careers guidance is a profession, and could, and does, make a difference to clients in ways that affirmed the research participants' contribution. All of these disposition and assets were shared by the research participants, creating both a picture and a model of identified careers guidance agents with a strong sense of belief and purpose.

This sense of strong and active agency (Ibid.), as well as a more specified habitus, is deepened by further exploration of identity of the agents-in-focus, and their position-practice relations and actions (Mouzelis, 1991). The latter is a particularly illuminating concept here (and is also used by Stones), in that it sheds light on how practitioners actually operationalise their roles which may be more generically defined in job descriptions. This again is a direct challenge to discourses that both assume a more general sense of what careers practitioners do, and their professional identity, without fully exploring the day-to-day substance of their practices. Extending the idea considered above of the research participants-in-focus assets, the position-practice relations and actions are predicated on the research participants' acute understanding of the organisations in which they work, and the structures that require their engagement in order to promote and provide client-centred guidance. The insights that the

data demonstrates show that the research participants have a shared sense of the challenges they faced in their particular environments. The nub of such challenges – shared by the research participants – was the need to promote the esteem, and relevance, of client-centred careers guidance services to their particular organisations in the context of rapid change. In this way, I would argue that their understanding of the shifting horizons for action (Stones, 2005) is an additional part of their identity, and indeed habitus, as knowledgeable careers guidance actors (to apply Giddens' concepts here, 1984).

To meet such challenges, the research participants also then revealed how their active agency – particularly their creativity and innovation (Stones, 2005) – helped to define further their professional identity. One facet of such creative, even assertive, agency, was the need to continually define and negotiate the service that they wanted to delivery. For those in schools, the latter appeared more pressing, especially as they had been re-employed as careers guidance practitioners rather than Connexions workers, and had to agree delivery contracts on their own. Even for those in FE (n=4) or HE (n=3) who were part of service teams, these participants still expressed a need to continually press their case for impartial, client-centred services with (in particular) often sceptical teaching staff. Part of the creative response to the challenges noted above was the research participants' embodiment of professional principles in their negotiations with managers, teachers and related colleagues. Rather than try and use inauthentic, aggressive tactics that would be inconsistent with their personal values, they used negotiated approaches that embodied their commitment to professional codes of practice. In addition, the research participants used tactics that also indicated their insights into their organisations: a kind of principled yet street smart approach. For some to express the sense of developing an ethical identity, and a brand, shows the extent of the creative agency in response to the particular hurdles posed by the organisations they worked within. The sense of embodied professional identity here yet again challenges the

more received notions of demoralised and/or existentialist practitioners (Colley et al., 2010; Mulvey, 2013).

One outstanding feature of the research participants' sense of professional identity was their pride in their particular expertise: career-related and labour-market information. The latter indicated a number of significant factors in the research participants' professional identity. Firstly, this in-depth knowledge helped them to define themselves as experts in the terms that they understood their respective organisations would recognise – again, an indication of creative agency. Crucially, they saw that such expertise was at the service of, and helped to promote, impartial, client-centred services, in contrast to other professionals who, in their view, had vested interests in promoting particular options. Further, the research participants understood how developing clients' informed decision-making, and information search skills, would enable a more effective and empowering engagement between agency and structure. In other words, developing such skills would boost clients' assets and help them to understand and unlock structures and processes that can seem inaccessible, e.g., recruitment and selection procedures operated by employers or education providers. Moreover, this expertise also helped to define aspects of their position-practices (Mouzelis, 1991) in relation to the question of agency and structure. Historically, and as discussed in chapter two, careers guidance has operated often as a gatekeeper between clients and opportunity structures (Peck 2004; Watts, 2015). As economic changes have eroded this functionalist role, practitioners have thus been challenged by governmental policies, and host organisations of the services, to redefine their purpose and value. The research participants here have expressed the latter in the terms of their position and practices: still located in between clients and opportunities, but now as ethical enablers, using LMI as one of the main empowering resources to promote career skills.

An additional example of position practices that signify both creative agency, and professional values and identity, is the research participants' commitment to being part of a community of practitioners. In part, this illustrates their creativity in rebuilding networks that had been negatively affected in particular by the effects of the Education Act (2010) on practitioners in schools and FE. For those research participants from HE and adult guidance settings (especially the NCS), the organisational focus on employability targets, and employment outcomes could have atomised practitioners, and disincentivised collective endeavour. As noted in chapter five, a number of the research participants indicated the extent to which networking, and sharing of resources and support, strengthened their sense of professional identity. This activity also showed their ability to act within structures, while still reshaping them – in this case, rebuilding and/or maintaining supportive communities. Still further, such agency is another example of how values, beliefs and motivations in ethical, respectful, are made manifest, indeed embodied, in the research participants' sense of themselves as practitioners. In other words, it is not enough to be a careers guidance practitioner only within an organisational setting, or simply being concerned with hitting individual targets. To be identified as a practitioner also involved the notion of giving back to a professional community. The caveat here, as mentioned, is that this does not always extend to active membership of a professional body.

The above examples of creative agency also chime with Giddens's notion of the ways in which agents can reflectively monitor their conduct within structures, not be simply constrained by them (1984). As the research participants showed, most were very well aware of their expertise, and the value they added to clients and organisations. This was enabled by the critical distance (Stones, 2005) that they were able to maintain while still being embedded in their organisational structures. For example, the very clear satisfaction that they expressed in their work was based on, and strengthened by, client feedback, either during the

interactions or through more formal evaluation. In this sense, the critical distance was indicated by the fact that the research participants were not dependent on organisational feedback for their sense of pride and identity as practitioners. This independent rationalisation of their work and its value (Giddens, 1984) is an additional indicator of their self-aware agency. Such agency, and sense of identity become, in Mouzelis's (1991) terms, the medium for action and practice, through which the research participants seek to enact their professional and personal values. Thus, the foundations such reflexive, critical distance rest in large part on the research participants' motivations, values, qualifications, skills, expertise and membership of a community. At the same time, such distance does not lead to disengagement from action, but actually promotes ethical engagement in their organisations both as a professional value, and the means by which they deliver careers guidance.

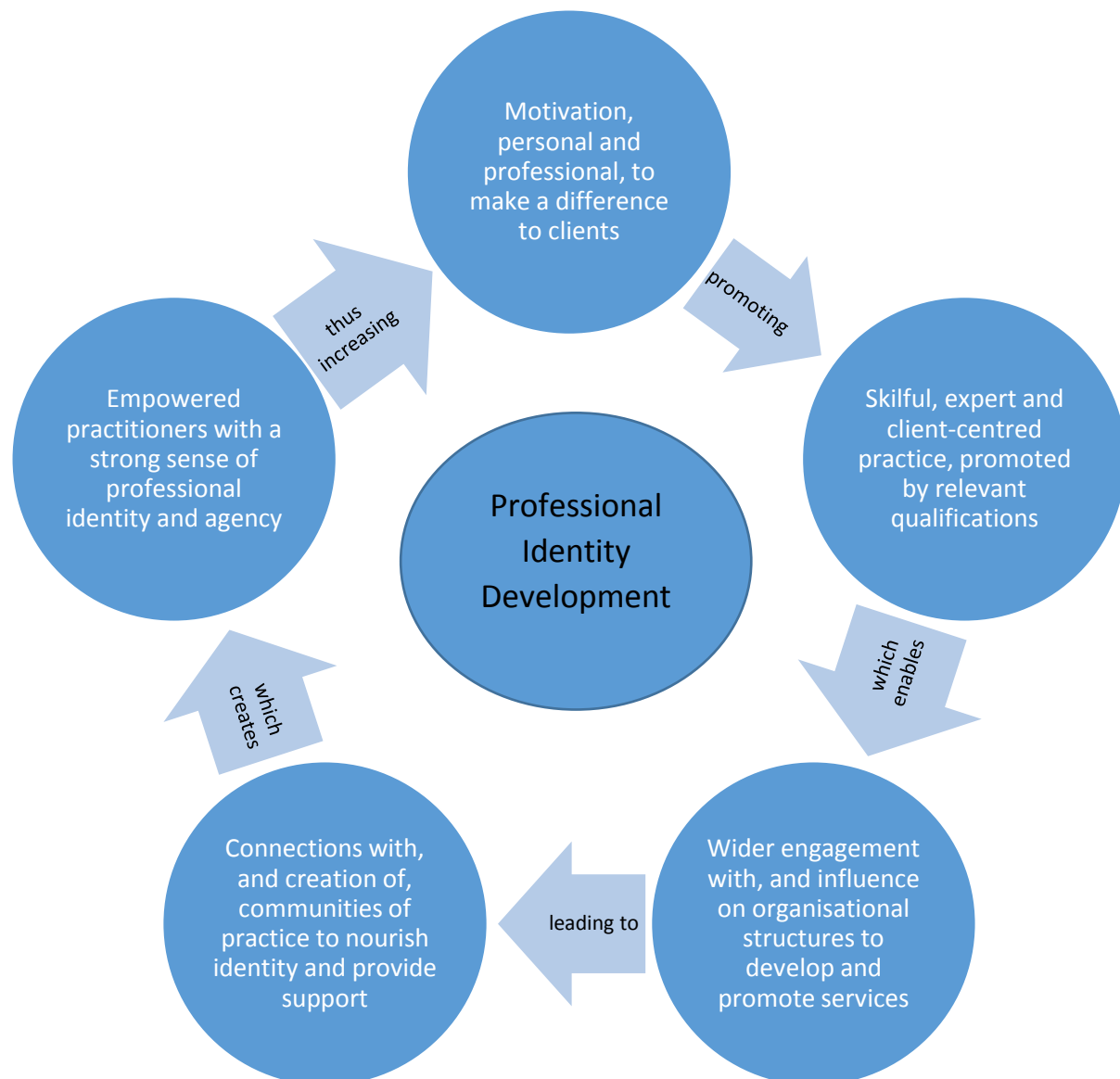
A final aspect of this active, reflexive agency, and one which helps to demonstrate further the structuring of their professional identity, is the ordering of concerns and priorities into a hierarchy of purposes (Stones, 2005: 101) – an order which is shared by all the research participants. Listed in chapter five were the main features of professional identity that emerged from the process of data analysis. The benefit of applying my chosen theoretical perspectives to this discussion – most notably Stones' concepts – are that the features above can be ordered, linked, and shown to be interrelated and structured. In this way, the professional identity is as much a product of day-to-day practices and interactions between knowledgeable agents, and the structures in which they exist and create meaningful action and outcomes. The hierarchy of purposes that also define the shared model of professional identity is as follows:

- Motivated by personal and professional values to make a difference to clients in key areas of their lives, leading to

- Skilful, expert and reflective practice that foregrounds client-centred and impartial practice, but which also produces
- Wider engagement with organisational structures and networks that embody the ethical principles of careers guidance, in order to
- Influence structures in order to achieve the particular, and more general, means by which change for clients is affected, leading to
- Connections with, and creation of, communities of practice that nourish identity and provide support, so that
- Practitioners are empowered, active agents with a strong sense of their professional identity and value.

The above points can be expressed in the following figure 2:

Figure 2: A model of professional identity for careers guidance



To use Stones' (2005) model of active agency, the above conditions of, and for, professional identity, are the main outcomes of the interactions between the careers guidance agents, and their structures.

6.9 Conclusions

To return to the Quadripartite Model of Strong Structuration (Ibid.), its final stage concerns the outcomes of agents in focus exercising their active agency within, and in response to, external and internal structures. In relation to careers guidance, this question could be rephrased as follows. In the light of the rapidly-changing government policies, the particular challenges faced by schools, FEIs, HEIs and adult guidance providers, and habitus and specific position-practices of the research participants concerned; then how successful have the agents been in influencing, changing, and/or preserving aspects of their work and professionalism? The answer apparently contained in the discourse explored in chapter two portrays practitioners as demoralised and atomised, with an organisationally-constrained sense of identity and habitus, within a profession that is lacking in any political leverage and power.

The data analysis and this discussion chapter present a competing perspective to this prevailing discourse. Seen through the lens of strong structuration (Stones, 2005) in particular, these stories captured the ways in which knowledgeable, committed, and motivated individuals actively engage and shape their everyday contexts to develop a common professional identity. All of the research participants recognised how influenced their work was by government policy, especially those in schools. However, this seemed a realistic and not a pessimistic view, given the high level of motivation and satisfaction that featured in the participant's narratives. An example of this view was expressed by

Participant R, who is based in a school: ‘I love my work, I love all of it, working with the young people, making a difference...I just love it.’ This statement captures much of the identity and spirit of practitioners whatever their organisational context.

Having presented the characteristics and features of a shared professional identity, this chapter also poses a theoretical challenge to the ways in which the negative discourses I refer to throughout this thesis have been constructed. As Stones (2005) proposes, the concepts of ontology-in-situ, levels of active agency and an ontic level of analysis, have served three main critical function in the generation of my model of professional identity. Firstly, and consistent with the grounded theory method I adopted, they have helped to keep the focus on the precise details of the research participants’ accounts, and the narrative they shared during the research interviews. Secondly, the levels of active agency have served to illuminate the sophisticated and self-aware ways in which the research participants enact their commitment to ethical careers guidance – a commitment which is also embodied in the ways they negotiate and network with managers and other professionals in order to achieve their professional aims. Thirdly, the most significant aspect is the ways in which the research participants’ sense of their professional identity is both mobilised and deepened by active engagement in the external and internal structures that characterise their everyday contexts. In these ways, for example, impartial, ethical careers guidance, and its key assets and expertise (most notably LMI) only become meaningful and active when the research participants use and influence the structures available to them. At a basic level, this might mean negotiating a programme of employability workshops in a HEI; at an ontological level, this might also mean re-affirming their professional identity, and brand, as an ethical, expert careers guidance practitioner.

The overall narrative that has emerged from this qualitative study is one that can be characterised as a story about the precise relationship between agency and structure. This has

both appraised the limits of existing discourse concerning careers guidance, its practitioners and their power; and produced a substantial model of the features, conditions, strength and shared nature of their professional identity. In the concluding chapter next, the various strands of this study will be drawn together and summarised, and the implications for further research, the training of careers guidance practitioners, and the limitations of my research will also be identified and discussed.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The main aim of this inquiry was to critically consider and explore the extent of a shared professional identity amongst careers guidance practitioners in England. The sector has been central to governmental policies concerning education, employment and training, particularly since 1947, and has been expected to fulfil two broad functions: to help promote economic prosperity; and tackle social exclusion. However, government policies since 2000 – particularly the introduction of Connexions, and the Education Act (2011) – have made a considerable impact on careers guidance, leading to an apparently Balkanised provision, with seemingly de-professionalised, disconnected and demoralised practitioners. The latter view is consistent with the wider, oppositional managerialist/practitioner discourse concerning public sector based professions. My research has sought to offer a different perspective. In adopting theoretical methods and approaches that seek to articulate the precise relationship between agency and structure, it has explored and critically analysed the rich narratives of the research participants, to develop a model of shared professional identity, whatever the organisational context. In doing so, it has also offered an alternative perspective to much of the orientation of the literature concerning the definition, purpose, development and delivery of career guidance, particularly the discourses that make assumptions about practitioners' agency and the overwhelming effects of structures.

This chapter will summarise the key findings of my thesis, and identify the contribution it makes to the literature concerning careers guidance practitioners, and its wider implications for the debates concerning professions more generally.

7.2 Key findings concerning the careers guidance profession in England

7.2.1 The status of the profession

The content of this thesis has critiqued, and challenged, the notion that policy changes discussed in chapter two have overwhelmed and demoralised practitioners. At the same time, the literature considered in chapter two does show that the careers guidance profession in England is in a precarious state. The profession's historical lack of political leverage in securing a regulatory bargain (Macdonald, 1995) was compounded by the Education Act (2011). In shifting the statutory duties for provision back to schools and FE colleges, but without the accompanying funding to fulfil such obligations, consistency and quality of provision has fragmented (Hughes, 2013b; Watts, 2014). Whilst revised guidelines from the DfE (2015) have clarified and strengthened the duties placed on pre-tertiary education providers, additional monies to schools and colleges for careers guidance services have not been forthcoming. It is tempting to focus the attention on the travails of provision in these institutions only. This is to overlook the fact that careers guidance services in HEIs are wedded to universities' employability agenda. As a result, practitioners' activities appear to be focused mainly on meeting organisational targets, especially the rate of graduates achieving positive destinations. Further, the NCS in England is also concerned with moving people from unemployment into jobs and/or training, with practitioners being subject to performance targets for action plans and employability outcomes. Whilst my thesis argues for a different perspective on practitioners' sense of agency, and professional identity, it is difficult to ignore the view that the profession's structural and political fault lines have been deepened by legislative developments since 2000.

7.2.2 Workforce development; and provision of training

A further indicator of the profession's esteem is the lack of a coherent, structured and properly-funded workforce development strategy for practitioners in England. As chapter two discusses, the sector did have the DipCG as a recognised training and entry route for practitioners who wanted to work in schools. Whilst the qualification wasn't a strict legal requirement, it was generally expected that careers advisers in schools in England would have one. Since Connexions, and the introduction of the variety of NVQ and QCF qualifications explored in chapter two, then the entry and training routes have become more fragmented and less clear. Reports and initiatives, such as the Silver Review (DfE, 2010), recommended that those delivering careers guidance should have, as a minimum, a level 6 qualification; the latter has not been taken up by government. The transfer of statutory duties back to schools illustrates this point: that schools (and colleges) have been given the freedom to arrange services that meet the type of services identified in the guidance in ways that best fit the institution (DfE, 2015). The CDI does have a professional register of practitioners; but there is no legal requirement in England for any careers guidance practitioner to join the register. In short, government does not see its role to develop a workforce development strategy for careers guidance. For HEIs, relevant and professional qualifications have never been an essential requirement. Again, it is hard to counter the view that managers in schools, colleges, HEIs and NCS settings adopt the approach that anyone can give careers guidance; and those recruited into the role may, or may not, be trained further, depending the employers' priorities, and the availability of funding.

A further pertinent point links to the trait approach (Millerson, 1964) of professions: that one of the typical characteristics of a profession is one of knowledge generation, particularly as it develops practitioners' practice. There have been some encouraging developments, e.g., when the CDI became the custodian of the sector's National

Occupational Standards (CDI, 2015) – at least the professional body was relatively free to revise the framework in response to sectoral demands. However, the latter in itself poses a problem, since the impact of the Education Act (2011) on providers in England has been catastrophic as discussed in chapter two. The number of large careers guidance services in England has declined, with few main providers, such as Prospects, left. This raises the question of the extent to which employers can inform the review and development of occupational standards. Indeed, there is no comprehensive or definitive overview of the amount of careers guidance practitioners in England; or what levels of qualifications they have. This is further compounded by the decline in the number of HEIs offering the QCG as part of a PGDip or MA programme. In England, at the time of writing, there are only four centres, each with relatively small numbers of students. In Scotland, there are two, but there are supported by Skills Development Scotland. In Wales and Northern Ireland, there are none. The provision of courses that offer in-depth insights into relevant theories, and their central importance to practice, looks vulnerable. Without the kind of governmental support offered in Scotland, then the sector's knowledge generation, and its impact on education and training, and practice remains vulnerable. This point is considered further under 7.5 below.

7.2.3 Professional bodies

In addition, the Silver Review (DfE, 2010) argued for a strong, unified professional body that could restate the case for the importance of careers guidance to economic prosperity and societal cohesion. Whilst this has been partially achieved by the creation of the CDI, Watts (2014) heavily criticised AGCAS for not joining this new body to present one, overall professional body for the sector. What the actual effect of having two professional bodies has on the status of the profession, the identity of practitioners, and provision, is hard to gauge. However, the apparent divide still indicates the ways in which

careers guidance and its practitioners are defined by their organisational context, and the role within that, rather than any orientation to an influential and powerful professional body.

Of more concern for the CDI and AGCAS is the extent to which their respective members actively contribute to the development and operation of each body. All of the research participants (n=19) did not indicate much if any active involvement in either, or indeed much sense of orientation to, or connection with, them. Some, e.g., the three participants from HEIs, noted that AGCAS could be helpful for resources; but the idea of active participation in a professional body and its collective community seemed remote. This may be anecdotal, but the former ICG had regional structures and representatives to help promote communities of practice, training and events, particularly to practitioners from schools, colleges and adult guidance settings. In my experience, these structures have diminished since 2010. As my research indicates, practitioners have been resourceful in creating their own communities of practice, but it would appear that these do not connect with the CDI. A challenge for the CDI and AGCAS is to re-engage its members, and careers guidance practitioners, in active participation, so that the professional bodies recover their role as *drivers* of communities of practice, and professionalism.

7.3 An emerging model of professional identity for careers guidance practitioners in England

Whilst acknowledging the continuing challenges to careers guidance and its practitioners presented above, my emerging model (see chapter 6, figure 2 above) of a shared professional identity addresses the overall problematic outlined in my introduction. It thus makes an important contribution to the literature concerning the careers guidance profession, and the literature concerning public sector based professions more widely. There are a number of key conclusions to identify in relation to the latter.

7.3.1 Practitioners' agency in developing their sense of professional identity

As the data showed, the participants were actively motivated to enter careers guidance, and in the main felt empowered enough to derive rich satisfactions from their work. Despite the fragmented qualification structure, they were still active in using the content and structure of the programmes they took to establish a strong core of identity and professionalism. This common core comprised a central commitment to the primacy of client-centred services; in-depth skills such as client interviewing; and, as featured strongly in the participants' narratives, an expertise in LMI. In their view, this expertise was hard won, and was of equal esteem and value to the subject knowledge of teachers and lecturers. Rather than being demoralised, or disempowered, the participants' narratives indicated how skilful they felt, and how proud of their work and the difference they felt it made to clients *and* the institutions they were worked for. As a result, and as chapter five and six indicate, they felt they belonged to a profession, and most felt they had a professional identity. The previous chapter also identifies the common and shared features of the latter. This shared model of identity is a key aspect of the contribution my thesis is making to the literature concerning the careers guidance profession.

7.3.2 Agency in relation to everyday structures

The second concluding point here is the ways in which the practitioners' understood, and felt able to use and influence the everyday structures in which they operated. Those from schools, FE colleges and HEIs in particular expressed insights into their organisations' structures and cultures – insights that enabled them to advocate for the importance of careers guidance, and to negotiate types and levels of service provision. For those from adult guidance (and NCS) settings, their everyday power lay in their ability to demonstrate their accountability and performativity while remaining client-centred. Whilst these participants

(n=5) did express some frustration with action plans and similar targets, they sounded far from being demoralised and disempowered. This ability to act otherwise and yet within everyday structures (Giddens, 1984) was also indicated by the participants' accounts of the ways in which they negotiated services within their organisations. Instead of conceiving of their professionalism as in opposition to their employer, they understood the need to engage and negotiate with managers in ways that were also consistent with the client-centred principles. In this way, their professionalism, and professional identity, represented an overall way of being and acting within their employing organisations, not just with clients. In my view, this offers a very different perspective to the managerialist/practitioner paradigm offered by Evetts (2005) and Banks (2006) in particular.

7.3.3 Additional dimensions to the relationship between agency and structure?

Following on from this to my third key point concerns an additional dimension to the relationship between agency and structure. The sensitising theoretical perspective I adopted – that of strong structuration (Stones, 2005) – led to a further fresh insight into the ways in which agents engage with structures to produce meaning. I argue in chapter six that the participants' engagement with their organisations, and with the effects of policy on them, developed and strengthened their sense of professional identity and professionalism. Two examples are worth revisiting to illustrate this point. Firstly, organisational responses to governmental policies discussed in chapter two led to the participants reappraising (and in some cases recasting) their role and identity. For instance, those participants who moved from Connexions (n= 5) spoke of a renewed sense of their role as careers guidance practitioners, to the extent of re-branding themselves. Secondly, those from schools, colleges and adult guidance settings also provided rich insights into the ways they had recreated networks and communities of practice despite the pressure of organisational accountabilities. If those from HEIs appeared less connected with practitioners outside of their institutions,

then they spoke positively of the changes to their roles, e.g., in relation to the employability agenda. Again, these factors indicated empowered agents who acknowledged the constraints of their organisational contexts, but who were still able to use their considerable assets to implement their professional values. As well as offering a fresh perspective to the literature concerning the careers guidance profession, and public sector professions more widely, the use of strong structuration (Stones, 2005) may also offer a useful sensitising framework for future, associated research. The value of concepts such ontology-in-situ, and ontic analysis (Stones, 2005) was in their sensitising properties, so that any assumptions about careers guidance practitioners, based on a less precise ontology-in-general, could be directly challenged. That is not to say that practitioners in the public sector do not face challenges: more, it is to suggest that the challenge of strong structuration is to examine the precise and specific ways in which agents engage with structure, so that richer (and perhaps more accurate) portrayals of professionalism and identity can emerge.

7.4 Limitations of the research; and suggestions for further research

In presenting a model of professional identity for careers guidance practitioners, and its theoretical underpinnings, I am also aware of the limitations of the research presented in this thesis. Whilst the model may offer implications for research into professional identity more widely, it does not purport to be a more general theory. Further, careers guidance is subject to new government policies, so that in meeting more recent statutory duties (DfE, 2015), other professionals such as teachers may take on increasing amounts of careers co-ordination and even guidance work. This research did not include teachers in its sampling, being concerned only with practitioners as per the sampling criteria in chapter four. It would be fascinating research to examine the effects on professional identity of covering two types of linked yet distinct functions: teaching; and careers guidance work. In my sampling, too, career coaches did not figure (with the exception of participant N, though she still considered

herself as a careers guidance practitioner, and only used the phrase ‘career coach’ when working with corporate clients). Again, it would be interesting to explore the identity of these practitioners, particularly as they can often work on a self-employed basis, and with clients who are experiencing organisational change (Yates, 2013). In adopting grounded theory as a rigorous method, I was clear that in my theoretical sampling, I reached theoretical saturation in my data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). However, my approach focussed on practitioners in England, and a UK-wide study of practitioners’ professional identity would be welcome, particularly as my contention is that the latter emerges in large part from the interaction between agency and structure. It would be interesting to explore the extent to which a more coherent and firmly-supported national service, such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS), employed practitioners with a stronger professional identity, and/or with different aspects and dimensions. I suspect the features identified in this thesis would be very similar if not identical; what may vary might be particular dimensions, e.g., the extent to which SDS’ (2015) concern with workforce skills required different activities of practitioners.

7.5 Implications for qualifications, training and CPD

As an educator, it has long been my contention that trainee practitioners need to develop their organisational awareness, a critical understanding of the effects of policy on practice, and their interpersonal skills, at the same time as acquiring interview skills and insights in career choice theories. This certainly reflects my background; and the conclusions above confirm my view of the need to encourage trainees and learners to acquire a critical appreciation of the profession, its provisions and organisation, and the ways in which careers guidance skills can also increase assertiveness and negotiation skills. The learning outcomes for the QCG and the level 6 Careers guidance Development Diploma reflect this view to some extent, e.g. in Module 3 of the current QCG; however, the curriculum needs to cover

not just how to form partnerships with other professionals, but also how understand and work effectively within complex and changing contexts.

A linked point here is the ways in which the participants expressed their sense of belonging to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). In the main, they appeared more connected with local or regional networks, rather than professional bodies such as the CDI or AGCAS. The sense I gained was that they would connect with them where they could offer practical information and advice to help them with their work, e.g. concerning labour market information. I did not glean much of a sense from the participants of wanting to be involved and contribute for the collective good. Again, I need to acknowledge the impact of my experience and values: that I have held (and continue to hold) a very strong professional value that it is the professional duty of practitioners to contribute to the profession for the benefit of all and without a foremost concern for cash or kudos. In other words, I could not quite escape a sense of regret at the participants' apparent lack of this value (though, of course, I did not express it).

However, the strong and positive sense expressed by the participants of belonging to a profession, and of having a professional identity, must offer an opportunity to the respective bodies to capitalise on this passion and commitment to making a difference to clients. Further, the CDI and AGCAS may wish to consider ways in which the relationship between theory and knowledge generation, and practice, is re-established. Sampson (2017) offers an example of such a model, where universities can act as centres where researchers, educators and practitioners can evaluate existing theories and models of practice, and develop new ones, in order to meet the challenges posed by changing career and employment patterns. It is true that centres such as the Institute of Employment Research at the University of Warwick, and the International Centre for Guidance Studies (ICeGS) at the University of Derby, are fully engaged in such activities. The remaining QCG centres in England also have

the opportunity to become careers guidance laboratories (Ibid.), so that the link between theory and practice is reinforced and reclaimed. Such laboratories may appeal strongly to the research participants who, currently, appear to be driving their own professional development.

7.6 Implications for the narrative (and discourse) of careers guidance as a profession

As discussed earlier, the view presented by theorists and scholars of the state of the careers guidance profession can often be bleak: not uniformly so; but as the literature reviews and the conclusions have shown, the ‘story’ that articles tell can be of a profession in crisis, with its core values, skills and practitioners devalued and downgraded. In this thesis, I certainly have not tried to present a counter view that is so rose-tinted as to completely ignore the major changes over the last two decades that have adversely affected the profession. At the same time, however, the participants’ narratives have offered a different perspective that shows committed, skilful and effective practitioners who feel they are part of a profession, and that they have a professional identity.

Further – and this is key – the main features of such identity, such as the commitment to client-centred services, expertise in career-related information, and effective engagement with organisational structures, are common to all contexts. There is a substantial model of professional identity with definable features. The professional bodies – the CDI and AGCAS – have renewed energy in promoting the status and value of the profession to a wide variety of stakeholders, not least the English government, and part of their message is that there is a common identity and core to the profession as a whole that has remained consistent and strong in the face of a century of reforms and constant change.

Not only does government need to hear this message, but the members of professional bodies and practitioners need to hear this, too. Again, this is anecdotal, but when I delivered a workshop at the two National Careers guidance roadshows in 2014 concerning the interim

results of my research, the room was packed (c.200), and I attracted the highest attendance of the day. The interest from those who attended in professional identity, its definition and importance, was intense. It left me with a clear message about the value of this debate to those in the profession and the desire to communicate a strong and positive view of professional identity. This message was also reflected in the participants' accounts.

In other words, we have a different story to tell about the profession and the professionalism and the professional identity of those who work within it.

7.7 Concluding reflections

Finally in this section, I reflect on the possible future developments for the profession and its practitioners in England, and the research process I have followed. The latter is consistent with the reflective approach I have discussed elsewhere, e.g., in chapter five when I reviewed the ways in which I had conducted the interviews with the initially-sampled participants. It also links to the discussion of my situatedness in the profession (see section 1.5 in the introduction), and the ways in which my privileged access offered both benefits and potential drawbacks.

In relation to possible future developments for the profession, I acknowledge in section 7.2.1 above the challenges that the profession has faced in England, particularly since the introduction of the Connexions service in 2001. In chapter two, I also discuss the recent work of the CDI in lobbying government for further statutory guidance for schools and colleges. The hope is that such guidance will identify minimum qualification standard to be set at level 6 for practitioners who provide careers guidance; and strengthen OFSTED's role in inspecting the quality and consistency of guidance provision. The aim of the latter in particular is to encourage schools not to simply tack on careers guidance responsibilities to the existing duties of teachers. The extent to which government will address these concerns, and enshrine the desired requirements and funding for careers guidance provision, remains to

be seen. Since 2010, however, successive governments in England have made clear their preferred standards of delivery without making any recommendations for workforce development, or any extra funding to support it. If the latter remains up to schools (not just for careers guidance), then any educational achievement targets, or budget pressures, may affect (even relegate) the importance of careers guidance in pre-tertiary settings. It is my view, too that adult guidance provision in England will continue to be driven by the employment and skills agenda, and thus will remain fixed on achieving targets that include employment or training outcomes. Services in higher education will also remain heavily influenced by HEIs' concerns with recruitment, student satisfaction, teaching quality, and employability. As my model of professional identity indicates, I am confident about practitioners' agency and ability to inform and shape the provision within their immediate organisational settings, and derive significant meaning from their work. At the same time, the structural aspects discussed throughout the thesis are likely to stay very challenging.

My reflections on the research process also cover a range of responses. The choice of grounded theory as my method developed my research discipline, particularly when I employed the approaches and techniques established by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Identifying axials (Ibid.) in the participants' narratives was fruitful, since they indicated, for example, what authentic and client-centred practice meant and did not mean. In addition, grounded theory enabled me to view the interrogation of data as a theory-building exercise, so when immersing myself in the participants' narratives, I maintained a critical distance and did not lose my way in the detail. As I note in chapter five, I felt privileged when listening to the participants' accounts, and particularly how readily they volunteered their views and ideas, as well as their stories of the career journeys. Uppermost in my mind during the interviews was the need to act as a researcher, rather than an experienced and esteemed individual in the profession. This helped me to put aside any preconceptions about likely

answers and views, so that any potential drawbacks of my privileged access were mitigated or avoided. The value of pursuing this research aim has also been validated by the fact that professionalism and professional identity are key areas of research for the profession, and offer further potential for research projects. In overall terms, my desire to make a contribution to the literature by addressing the problematic identified in the introduction has developed my skills and insights as an educator and emerging researcher.

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APPENDIX 1: FULL TABLE OF INITIAL CODES

Area A: Why did you enter Careers guidance?

Category	Further aspects	Internal/external factors
A1. Seeking a career change		
	A1a) Those from Human Resources (HR) backgrounds seeking to enter CG, especially FE and HE	A1a)i) Moving from HR: respondents from graduate recruitment backgrounds or recruitment agencies
A2. Extend positive aspects of previous roles		
	A2a) Those from HR backgrounds wanting to concentrate on <u>developing</u> people's careers	
	A2b) Those from HR backgrounds wanting to help people <u>access job market more effectively</u>	
	A2c) Those from Job Centre Plus wanting to work within a <u>more 'ethical' role</u>	
	A2d) Those from educational backgrounds such as Teaching Assistant wanting a <u>more 'professional' role</u>	
A3. Appeal of role		
	A3a) Role is perceived to be <u>flexible</u>	
	A3b) Role perceived to be <u>varied</u>	
	A3c) Role perceived to be <u>'helping people'</u>	A3c)i) This identified as their first reason by those working with disadvantaged groups
	A3d) Role is <u>more ethical and more 'me'</u>	A3d)i) Identified by those from HR and Job Centre Plus backgrounds

Additional notes (as consistent with 'memo writing' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967))

So far, interesting pattern emerging of those from HR or recruitment backgrounds who want to move into CG, especially in FE or HE, as they want to extend the 'helping' aspects of their role, whilst retaining a sense of working with employers. FE and HE are perceived as offering more opportunities to do this, and also seen as more prestigious.

Those who are working with more disadvantaged clients have so far tended to identify the appeal of helping people first before the perceived flexibility and autonomy of role

Area B – What aspects of the participants’ current roles appeal the most?

Category	Further aspects	Internal/external factors
B1. Variety and autonomy		B1)i) Mentioned particularly by those in FE and HE; less by those in NCS roles
B2. Helping someone	B2a) Made a difference to the client	B2a)i) Mentioned by all participants
B3. Particular aspects of the role	B3a) One-to-one guidance	B3a)i) Identified by those in FE and HE
	B3b) Making an impact on organisational developments	B3b)i) Identified by those in FE and HE
	B3c) Particular challenges and characteristics of the client group	B3c)i) Identified by those offering targeted service and those in the NCS

Additional notes

Note the code common to all participants – that of helping others and making a difference. This links to codes A2 and aspects of A3 above. Interesting that those in more targeted roles and in NCS mention the appeal of working with disadvantaged groups; whereas those in FE and HE don’t mention this. Also, it would appear that those in FE and HE enjoy the chance to make an impact on the development of the organisation – possibly expressing a greater sense of role esteem and agency. Could this also link to the ‘previous socialisation’ of those in FE and HE, e.g. they have tended to come from HR or more commercial roles, and so thus enjoy these aspects already, and/or enter with a greater sense of self-efficacy?

Area C – What are the aspects that you least enjoy about your role?

Category	Further aspects	Internal/external factors
C1. Targets	C1a) Their implementation	C1a)i) Noted by those in NCS roles
	C1b) Receiving feedback only when it is negative, e.g. when targets have not been achieved	C1b)ii) As above
C2. More routine aspects	C2a) ‘Conveyor belt’ checking of CVs or UCAS forms	C2a)i) Identified by those in FE and HE who had then moved into broader project-based or management roles
C3. Specific contextual factors	C3a) Challenge to impartiality	C3a)i) Instance in FE only
	C3b) Not enough time for guidance	C3b)ii) Single instances in FE and HE only

Additional notes

The answers here were more scattered and with no overall and commonly-held view emerging. Interesting detail offered by interview 5., where participant from NCS talked with some feeling about the commitment felt towards the clients, and how they clung to this in the face of targets

which seemed irrelevant to the work. Indicative, perhaps, of a core of ‘professionalism’ and ‘identity’ that is challenged by organisational managerialism. (Evetts, 2005)

Area D – In what ways do your qualifications underpin your work?

Category	Further aspects	Internal/external factors
D1. Ethical codes	D1a) Client-centredness as meaning impartiality and not for the convenience of the organisation	D1a) i) Those with QCG identified this aspect most readily, though noted too by those in NCS; and acutely felt by those who are self-employed
		D1a) ii) Those in HE and FE identified a culture of debate, discussion and reflection (a learning culture), especially where other practitioners had the QCG
D2. Theories and models		D2a) i) Most readily identified by those with the QCG
D3. Encourages reflection	(Debate whether this is a further aspect of client-centredness, as one participant noted this approach as helping to maintain the focus on the client)	Identified by all

Additional notes

It was interesting to see how readily those with the QCG identified ethical codes as being the most dominant aspect of the qualification in the way it underpins their work. An interesting point for reflection – that is, to what extent has the process of ‘becoming’ a careers adviser focussed them on intrinsic values, beliefs and feelings, rather than on ‘cognitions’ that involve concepts and theories? Note the apparent existence of ‘learning cultures’ in HE and FE where issues of ‘doing and becoming’ are debated, as well as notions of ‘what is the right thing to do.’ This seems much less apparent in NCS.

Those who are self-employed are acutely aware of ethical commitment to their clients, in terms of ‘proper conduct’ as well as focus on the clients’ issues.

The particular role the QCG plays in fostering this ethical commitment, and core, is notable in the data so far.

Those with NVQ tend to mention ‘reflection’ as being important; again, this may reflect the terminology of the qualification.

Area E – What Continuing Professional Development have you undertaken?

Category	Further aspects	Internal/external factors
E1. Staff meetings	E1a) Discussion with colleagues	E1a)i) Identified by those in HE and FE
E2. LMI updates	E2a) Day training events	E2a)i) Most common feature identified by all participants and seen as the area that they 'lack' the most knowledge of or skills in
	E2b) Presentations to staff	
	E 2c) Own research	
E3. 'Not much'		E3 i) Identified by those in NCS settings most readily

Additional notes
<p>Note how those in HE and FE identified staff meetings first as being part of their CPD. This links to Area D above where discussions amongst those with QCG helped to reinforce and extend the learning undertaken during the qualification.</p> <p>LMI updates were identified by all participants, and gave an interesting insight into a) what they felt their qualifications lacked, b) the need to remain continually abreast of labour market changes, and c) what they felt was a critical aspect of the value they add to clients <i>and</i> to their sense of 'becoming more like a careers adviser'. The latter could be a key feature of what may be termed 'professional identity': that is, 'I am more like a careers adviser because I know more about LMI and the key role it plays'. Also indicating more confidence in the role, too?</p> <p>More target/contract driven roles noted the lack of CPD; perhaps this reflects the priorities of the organisations and the apparent lack of time and resources it sets aside for staff development</p>

Area F: What does the term 'profession' mean for you?

Category	Further aspects	Internal/external factors
F1. Level of formal education or training needed for entry into the profession	F1a) High level needed	F1a) i) Most readily identified by those with QCG qualifications
F2. A career that is recognised by society	F2a) That is also secure of purpose	F2a)i) Identified by practitioners across all sectors
F3. Requires membership of a professional body	F3a) The professional body also regulates its members	F3a)i) Identified across all sectors
Additional items:		
F4. A career that has a structure	F4a) With possible progression upwards into more senior roles	F4a)i) Identified by two from FE with NVQ
F5. A career that offers scope for autonomy and influence		F4i) Identified by two from HE with QCG
F6. Being proud of your work not just doing a job	F6a) and can be applied to service jobs that may be viewed as 'low status'; example used was a waiter who dedicated his life to service and doing it well	F6a)i) Identified by one individual from FE with NVQ

Additional notes

Participants responded fairly quickly to this question and it didn't provoke much uncertainty or deliberation. Responses commonly featured aspects of societal esteem and entry requirements; again, a possible link to the latter as those who identified this in their definition have the QCG...and so are more likely to identify this factor?

Area G: What does the term 'professional' mean to you?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
G1. Behaviour and Physical presentation:	'what you wear' 'being 'business-like' 'appearing to be professional' 'using appropriate the language'	This was the most consistent item (as per 20/10/13, 58% n = 7
G2. Demonstrating 'client-centredness'	'being 'respectful' 'having the interests of the client at heart' 'doing the best for the client'	Answers are more scattered, but responses under this area (as per 20/10/13) are 50%, n = 5
Individual items		
G3. Adhering to professional ethics and standards		N= 3 (1 HE, two FE)

Additional notes

Note how the first item noted by the participants concerned behaviour and physical presentation, perhaps reflecting more 'common sensical' notions of 'being professional.' The second item concerned client-centredness, e.g. 'doing the best for the client'. Noted a linked item: adhering to professional standards. A combination of 'common sense' type considerations as well as items that may link to definitions of professionalism.

H: What for you is 'professional identity'?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
H1. 'World view' and status accorded to a particular profession	Participants' definition more concerned with how a profession is viewed by society, and this societal view (and esteem) shapes identity, rather than any 'internal sense' of how 'a professional' sees themselves	N = 5; individuals from different organisations
Individual items		
H2. Feeling part of a wider community of professionals		
H3. 'Doesn't mean anything; never considered it'		
H4. 'My job title and the industry I work in'		N = 2
H5. Resistance to defining it as such and doesn't want to seem snobbish in doing so	Class-based aspects here: individual concerned with the exclusive nature of 'being a professional'	

H6. How one views one's own profession		
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Additional notes
This question seemed to provoke the most hesitancy and the most common answer captured sense of how the participants felt that professional identity is defined by the society's wider view of the profession. This answer also captured the esteem by which society held CG, that is, if it CG has a professional identity than it is because society values it highly.

J: For you, is Careers guidance a profession?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
J1. Yes		
	'Because of the qualifications needed'	N = 4 (all with QCG)
	'Being qualified helps me to see the whole picture'	N = 2 (all with QCG)
	'Don't think anyone can do it'	N = 2 (all with QCG)
	'Because of the ethics and impartiality involved'	N = 2 (all with QCG)
J2. Equivocal		
	'Still 50/50'	N = 1 – individual working in a targeted support role with LAC
	'It used to be'	N = 1 – individual from FE who is very experienced and spoke bitterly of the changes visited on the profession by Connexions
	'Still becoming'	N = 1 – individual from Connexions and then into FE; went into a job and then took NVQ 4 as required by employer

Additional notes
The majority of responses so far were a very firm 'yes' – note the fact that participants held the QCG were firm in their responses. Note narrative detail with common items such as the strong view on the need for a minimum level of qualification; and how this should lend a professional credibility to the role, which is needed when dealing with those from other professions.

K. Do you feel you have a professional identity?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
K1. Yes		
	Firm	N = 5
	'Still needs to develop more'	N = 1 – NCS role
	'Still a careers adviser at heart despite changing role'	N = 3 – 2 in HE, 1 in FE; those who roles encompassed project or supervisory aspects
	'I do'	N = 1: individual with specialist, targeted role; almost

		'her own' identity which encompasses careers advice and welfare support...reflective of still being a Personal Adviser
	'Personally I feel I have'	N = 1; NCS role and strong sense of own identity despite organisational pressures
K2. Equivocal	'I don't know if I do, really'	N = 1; NVQ 4 Adviser from Connexions into FE and who is moving into more general support role

Additional notes
Apart from 1, note the firmness of the responses from all the participants so far. Have I got enough here on <i>why</i> this sense is firm?

L. Has your Professional Identity changed over time?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
L1. Yes		N = 9
	'Now feel like a careers adviser' as skills and knowledge, <u>especially labour market information</u> , have developed as a result of experience and training	N = 7 drawn from all the organisational settings
	'Hugely...it's all about money and targets' – strong sense of negative impact of organisational factors on personal sense of PI	N = 1 NCS adviser
	Rich narrative detail reflecting historical development since late '70s	
L2. Equivocal	'Identity is still developing'	N = 1; adviser moving into new role; Connexions + NVQ 4 + FE. Seems more interested in international development, and careers guidance work has been 'good enough' match for now

M – What has been the impact of the organisation you work for on your professional identity?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
M1. Positive aspects		
	‘Quality of feedback’	N = 1; NCS
	Employer paid for their qualification	N = 2; both HE and QCG
	‘Massive impact’: role development and extension	N = 2; both HE and QCG
	Need to achieve organisational targets has raised profile and attracted resources	N = 5; HE and FE; organisations named have undergone restructuring and attracted staffing and ‘physical’ resources, e.g. office moves
	Perceived positive challenge in needed to refresh and redefine service ‘brand’	N = 2: from same FE college; individuals concerned from HR and business background and so this may reflect the ‘marketing’ language used
M2. Equivocal	Need to maintain appearance of impartiality by resisting uniforms	N = 2: from same FE college as above
	Competing Employability units in Faculties	N = 1: HE
M3. Negative aspects	Targets in terms of pressure to meet them	N = 2: NCS work
	Targets in terms of undermining impartiality	N = 2: NCS work
	Feedback only when targets are not hit	N = 1: NCS work

Additional notes

Note the more positive responses from HE and FE: that services in being expected to meet clearer targets are also being more resources and a higher profile. Note some disquiet in the equivocal aspects. Those from NCS note the negative impact of tight targets and ‘feedback by exception’.

N. Impact of codes of ethics on your work

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
N1. Sense of conflict between practitioners’ ethics and organisational targets		N = 4: 1 NCS; 2 FE; 1 targeted work
	For NCS participant, note links between this response and the previous section concerning impact	
	For two FE participants, note link to section above, too, when discussing the need to remain impartial in the face of	

	organisational pressures to retain students for future courses and in adopting a uniform	
	For one from targeted work, conflict expressed as participant felt more ethical than 'tick box' fellow professionals in other settings	
N2. Strong		N = 8
	'Have the students' interest at heart'	N = 1: HE with QCG
	'Didn't think this before, but ethics are at the heartbeat of what I do'	N = 1: HE with QCG
	'I'm a very ethical person' – link to the reasons for entering CG	N = 2: FE with QCG + change of career from HR
	In relation to confidentiality and data protection	N = 2: 1 targeted work; 1 NCS
	'Need for codes as you are working with people and you can be quite influential'	N = 1: Connexions + NVQ 4 + FE
	As a corrective to being judgemental	N = 1: FE + DipCG and rich experience
N3. Equivocal	Stronger sense of ethics earlier in role but they can slip	N = 1: HE + QCG but now in employment manager role

Additional notes

Note that participants readily responded to this question. Most as at 20/10/13 responded very strongly that ethics were part of their work, with only 1 noting the 'operational' aspects, e.g. in outlining confidentiality.

P: Do you feel connected with other practitioners?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
P1. Yes in own organisation		N = 3: 1 NCS and 2 HE
	Gaining a sense of support, sharing and confirmation	
P2. Yes, locally and regionally		N = 4: FE
	Sense of sharing information and expertise	
	Sense of 'keeping up' with developments in the region	
	Wanting to develop standards and practice of others	N = 2: FE with QCG

	Sense of commonality with those who are 'helping people and treating them with respect'	
P3. Yes through the professional body		N = 2: HE + QCG
	Gaining and sharing expertise and knowledge	
	Linking up with 'like minded' people	
P4. No		N = 3: 1 HE; 1 NCS; 1 FE
	Role focus has changed	
	Felt little in common with those from same sector, esp. In feeling more advanced in practice	N = 1: HE + role change to manager
	Doesn't even feel connected with team due to competitiveness and lack of trust fostered by targets	N = 1: NCS
	'Not currently' especially due to the aftermath of Connexions changes	N = 1: FE + historical background

Additional notes
Somewhat mixed views and evidence as noted above. Note a tendency of those from FE and in smaller teams to want to work in local and regional groupings for practical (and moral) support. Interesting that little connection was expressed with advisers more nationally and through professional bodies

Q: In what ways do you think your professional identity will develop over time?

Item	Feature	Internal/external factors
Q1: Yes but unsure as it would depend on policy change at organisational and governmental level		N = 5
	'Need to keep fighting for what I believe is right'	N = 1: NCS
Individual items		
Q2. Away from Careers guidance		N = 1: FE moving into a different role

Additional notes
Interesting in that identity development is seen as contingent on external factors. Does this link to how professional identity was defined, i.e. by wider society?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: QUESTIONS

John Gough

Outline Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this research study. I am interested in finding out more about the ways in which you feel you have a professional identity; what, or who, has contributed to its development; its aspects; and impact on your work. I am hoping that by understanding more about your professional identity, and that of other career guidance practitioners, that I will contribute to the emerging body of knowledge concerning professionalism in career guidance. These insights may enable me to assess the impact of rapid policy change on the professional identity of career guidance practitioners, and the extent to which this identity has survived and indeed developed in different service contexts. The data may also have implications for the training and development of those in the profession, as well as those who want to enter the new professional body, the Career Development Institute (CDI)..

In this interview, I hope you will tell me about your current role and the aspects of it which you enjoy most and least. I would also like to explore the qualifications you took before entering your role, and/or during it; these can be career guidance related or from other subject areas. In addition, I am particularly keen to find out if you feel you have a professional identity; what has helped to develop it; and the factors that help to maintain and develop it. Equally, if you don't feel you have one, then I am also very interested in exploring the reasons for this. What will be important to explore, too, is the extent to which you feel connected with other practitioners and a wider 'career guidance community'; and how this also contributes to any sense of professional identity you may have. Finally, I'd like to seek your views on the ways in which you see your identity changing in the future, and factors that may contribute to this.

Overall, I am hoping that you will share with me your story of how you became a career guidance practitioner, and your journey since then.

Our interview together will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes. For your information, below are the questions that will guide the interview process. I hope that you will be able to give these some thought prior to the interview.

Background information

Age

Present role (job title?)

Length of time in your current role (give dates)

Length of time as a career guidance practitioner (give dates)

Highest level of education

Year of award of most recent learning/qualification

IAG qualifications obtained (if any), e.g. NVQ 3 or 4 in IAG; DipCG; QCG

Other professional or work-related qualifications

Role details: entry; aspects; qualifications; CPD; formative influences

1. What led you to enter your career guidance role?
2. What aspects of your current role do you
 - a. Enjoy the most?
 - b. And least enjoy?
3. Tell me more about the IAG qualifications you followed/are following?
 - a. (If none, then ask the participant to outline their other professional and work-related qualifications, e.g. CIPD)
4. In what ways do they inform and underpin your work?
 - a. (If no IAG qualifications have been taken, then ask the participant to ask how recent qualifications may inform their work, e.g. CIPD)
5. What, if any, CPD have you undertaken?
 - a. If CPD is undertaken, what impact does it have on your work?
 - b. If none, perhaps a brief discussion about why this might be
6. Thinking more widely, what have been the formative influences on your development as a career guidance practitioner?
 - a. And why?

Profession, professional, professional identity: perceptions, experience, development

7. For you, what do the following words mean:
 - a. Profession
 - b. Professional
 - c. Professional identity
8. Do you consider career guidance to be a profession?
 - a. If so, why

- b. If not, why not?
- 9. Do you feel that you have a professional identity currently? (Ask this question even if the answer to question 8 is that career guidance is not considered a profession)
 - a. If yes, go to 10
 - b. If no, go to 15
- 10. In what ways do you feel you have a professional identity? (Here, explore further using the following prompts:
 - a. the participant's views on the main aspects and features of the identity
 - b. how the sense of identity makes an impact on the participant's work
- 11. In what ways has that identity developed or changed over time?
- 12. To what extent do you feel that your colleagues also have a professional identity?
 - a. If yes, what impact does this have on you?
 - b. If no, what impact does this have on you?
- 13. What factors have
 - a. Helped the maintenance and development of your sense of professional identity?
 - b. Hindered it?
- 14. What impact do you feel that your organisation has on your professional identity? (Go to 16 after this)

15. From question 9b. –

- a. Can you talk about your lack of professional identity?
- b. Have you experienced a sense of professional identity, either in career guidance or in any previous roles?
 - i. If yes, in what ways?
 - ii. What contributed to this sense of identity?
 - iii. If no, why?

Professional codes and networking

- 16. For all participants – what role does a code of ethics play in your sense of being professional?
 - a. If yes, what role?
 - b. If no, why?
- 17. Do you feel connected with career guidance practitioners from your own field, and with those from different organisations?
 - a. If yes, in what ways?
 - b. What impact has this networking had on your professional identity?
 - c. If no, what prevents this networking?

Looking forward

- 18. For all participants - How do you see your sense of professional identity changing over time?
- 19. What factors do you see affecting this?

APPENDIX 2a) DATE SCHEDULE

Participant identifier	Careers guidance qualifications	Practice setting	Length of time in CG role	Gender	Interview date
A	QCG gained within the last five years	National Careers Service (NCS)	4	Female	12/06/13
B	QCG gained within the last five years	Higher Education (HE)	3	Female	18/06/13
C	QCG gained within the last five years	HE	5	Female	18/06/13
D	QCG gained within the last five years	HE	4	Female	24/06/13
E	QCG gained within the last five years	FE	4	Female	26/06/13
F	QCG gained within the last five years	FE	4	Female	03/07/13
G	QCG gained within the last five years; NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	Targeted NEET provision	10	Female	04/07/13
H	QCF level 4 gained within the last five years	NCS	8	Female	08/07/13
J	NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	FE	8	Female	09/07/13
K	Dip CG gained over twenty five years ago	FE	35	Female	09/10/13
L	QCF level 4 gained within the last five years	School	10	Female	28/11/13
M	Diploma in Personal Adviser work	School	10	Female	08/01/14
N	DipCG gained within the last twenty years	Self-employed: adult guidance	21	Female	21/01/14
P	NVQ 4 gained within the last five years	Self-employed: school guidance	13	Female	21/01/14

Q	NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	School	12	Female	04/02/14
R	Dip CG gained within the last twenty-five years	School	34	Female	18/07/14
S	Dip CG gained within the last twenty-five years	NCS	36	Female	17/07/14
T	QCF level 4 gained within the last five years	NCS	5	Male	07/11/14
U	QCG gained within the last five years and NVQ 4 gained within the last ten years	NCS	12	Male	08/11/14